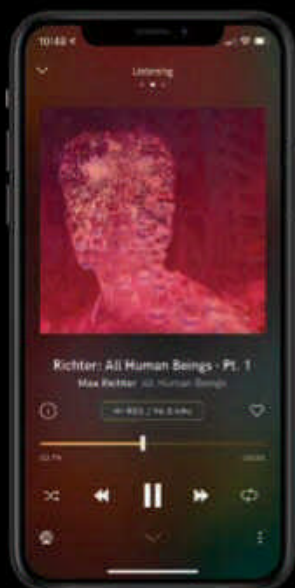


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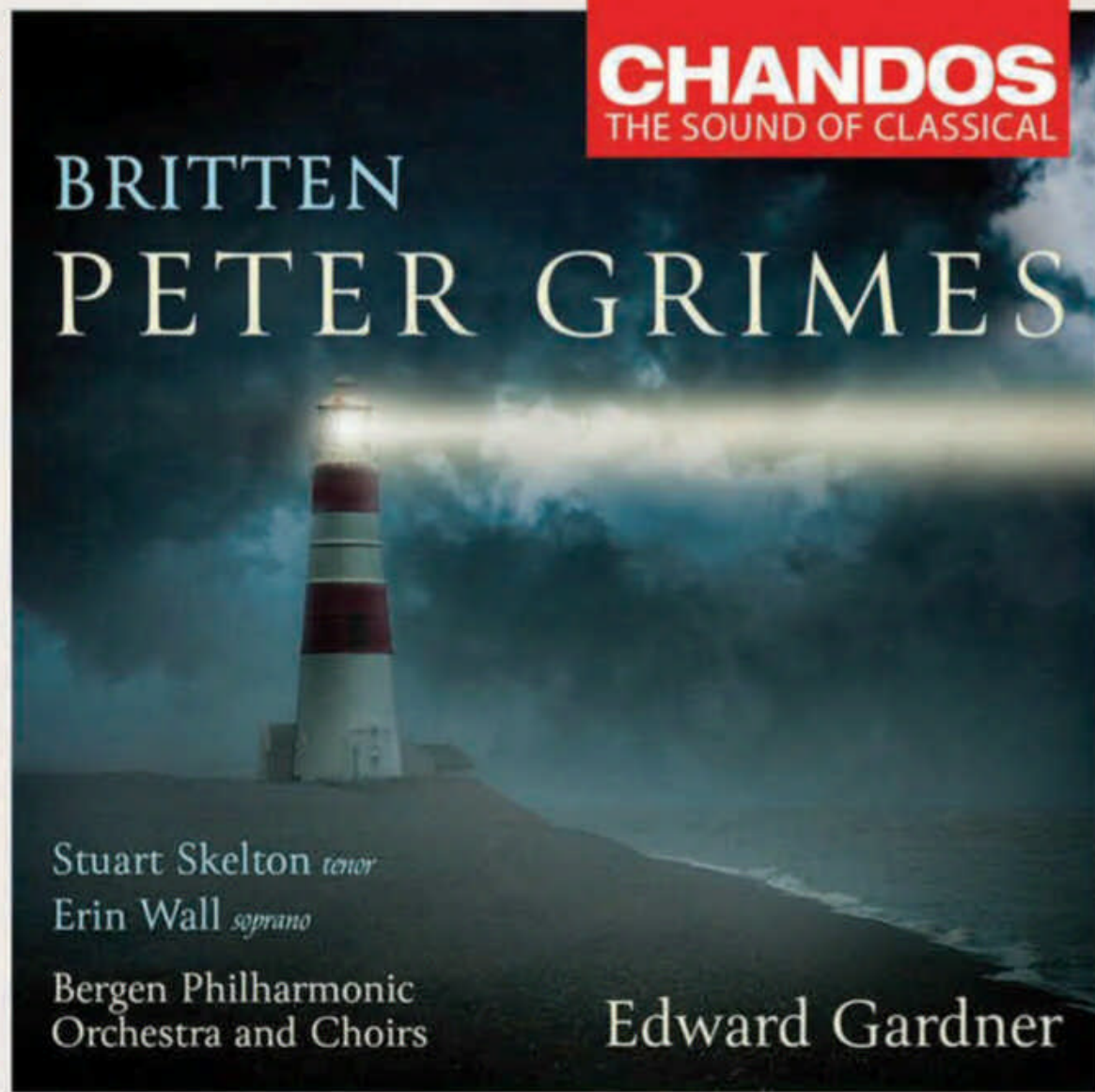
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'Yellowbird'

Bolling Suite for Cello and Jazz Piano Trio

Rowles The Peacocks^a **Tackett** The Yellow Bird^b

Aaron Tindall tuba **Shelly Berg** pf^b **Brian Russell**

elec gtr **Chuck Bergeron** ^adb/^belec bgtr^{ab} **Svet**

Stoyanov drums

Bridge © BRIDGE9536 (68' • DDD)



The tuba is often typecast as a supporting player at the bottom of the orchestra or as oom-pah champion in all sorts of bands. But in the right hands (and embouchure), it can be an expressive and dashing solo instrument, a reality made clear on this recording of hip works from the 1970s and '80s featuring the remarkable Aaron Tindall.

Hip shouldn't be confused with insubstantial. The three pieces Tindall animates with finesse and virtuosity embrace an amalgam of popular styles, from swinging jazz to rock, taking tuba player and inspired colleagues through challenges of entrancing and charismatic persuasion. Tindall is the poetic protagonist in Jimmy Rowles's *The Peacocks*, a ballad calling for seamless phrasing from both tubist and pianist, here the vibrant Shelly Berg. Joined in the disc's eponymous work, Fred Tackett's *The Yellow Bird*, by electric bassist Chuck Bergeron, electric guitarist Brian Russell and drummer Svet Stoyanov, the musicians savour the work's cheeky changes of mood and rock impetuosity.

The disc's centrepiece is a captivating account of Claude Bolling's Suite for cello and jazz piano trio, with tuba replacing the string instrument to splendid effect. Rooted in Baroque lingo but happy to wander off into diverse jazz territories, the score was written for Yo-Yo Ma, who recorded it in 1984 with the composer-pianist and friends. Tindall plays with masterly control and character, easily traversing the part's formidable difficulties, and he partners blissfully with the disarming trio

of Berg, Bergeron and Stoyanov. So much for oom-pah underpinning!

Donald Rosenberg

Brahms

'Complete Works for Violin and Piano'

Three Violin Sonatas. Scherzo, WoO2

Christoph Schickedanz vn **Chiharu Iinuma** pf

Centaur © CRC3498 (77' • DDD)



There is no shortage of recordings of Brahms's complete sonatas for violin

and piano by artists legendary and otherwise. And why not? They are among the composer's most eloquent creations, with a seemingly endless unfolding of thematic inspiration, harmonic richness and rhythmic subtlety. So it is no burden to encounter the fresh perspective on the sonatas offered on this new disc by the German violinist Christoph Schickedanz and Japanese pianist Chiharu Iinuma, who appear to have immersed themselves in the works' distinctive language.

The three sonatas hail from Brahms's maturity, and they share an inevitability of utterance and interaction. The first two, Opp 78 and 100, are fountains of lyricism, with the instruments weaving lines as if engaged in a series of tender and vibrant conversations throughout their respective three movements; the third, Op 108, boasts four movements of heightened rumination, at turns dramatic and graceful. Schickedanz and Iinuma, who both studied at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, approach these scores as if discovering them anew. The violinist is an elegant artist who pays keen attention to shadings and details, uses vibrato with restraint and shows more interest in conveying the music's intimacy than making big, Brahmsian statements. He has an ideal collaborator in Iinuma, a pianist sensitive to every shift in rhythm and texture, and fully in command of the challenging keyboard-writing.

The pair handle tempos, balances and transitions with seamless assurance, benefiting not only the later Brahms but also the fervid Scherzo in C minor (WoO2), which the 20-year-old composer wrote, along with Schumann and Albert Dietrich, in 1853 for the so-called *F-A-E Sonata* in tribute to Joseph Joachim. Whatever they touch, Schickedanz and Iinuma are outstanding champions of youthful and seasoned Brahms.

Donald Rosenberg

Picker

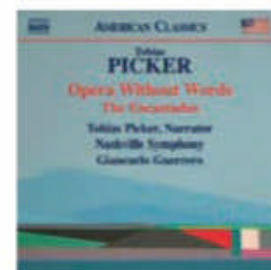
The Encantadas^a. Opera Without Words

^a**Tobias Picker** narr **Nashville Symphony**

Orchestra / Giancarlo Guerrero

Naxos American Classics © 8 559853

(58' • DDD • T)

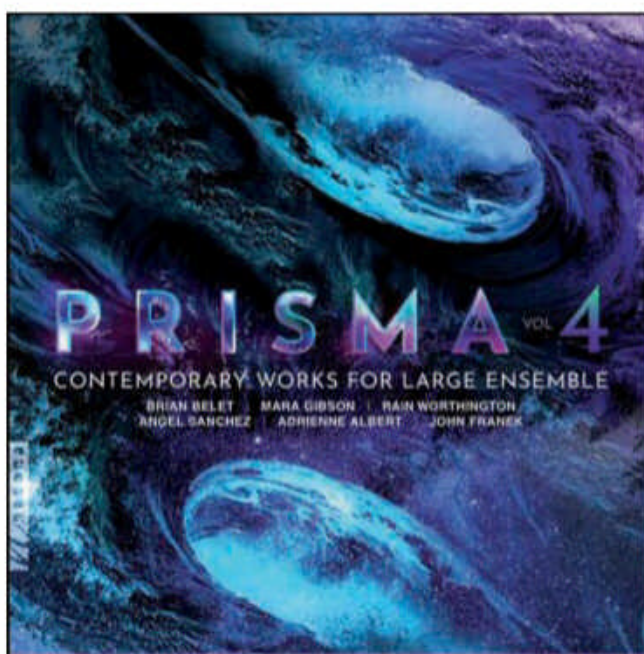


Tobias Picker's *Opera Without Words* is a brilliantly colourful concerto

for orchestra in which the purely instrumental voices are taken from a secret libretto he co-wrote with Irene Dische. The words in operas, the composer writes, 'are just an ornament to hear the beauty of the human voice. The music should be telling the story.'

Whatever the story, it is rich in wide-ranging, easily flowing, always absorbingly kinetic scenarios composed on a late Romantic core with nods to an assortment including Babbitt and Mendelssohn. No moment goes by without some arresting phrase or sigh, gorgeous flourish or melodramatic outburst. He makes solo strings do unimaginably delirious things, has invented new ways of making winds sound like strings, and promiscuously hands out audiophile riffs for unorthodox combos such as solo piano with two bassoons or tubas singing like Gerard Hoffnung once dreamt. Hedging bets, Picker has documented the creation so it can be performed as an opera with voices, words and staging.

Three decades earlier Picker had found in Melville's immersion in the Galapagos



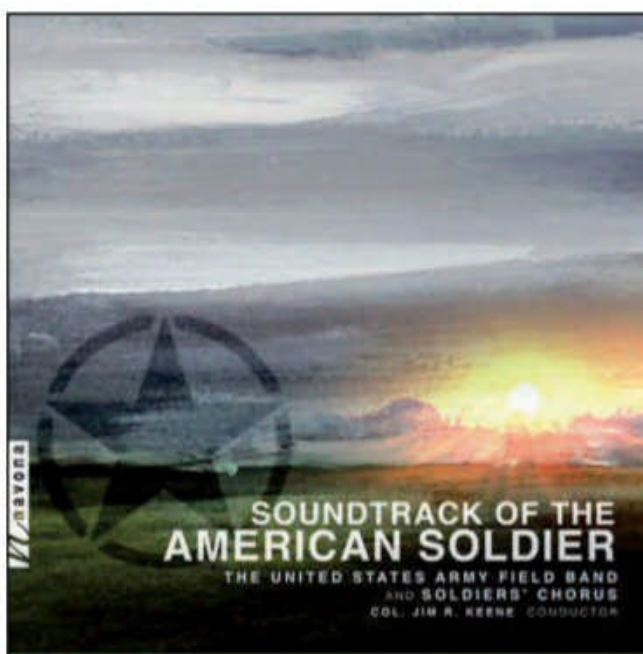
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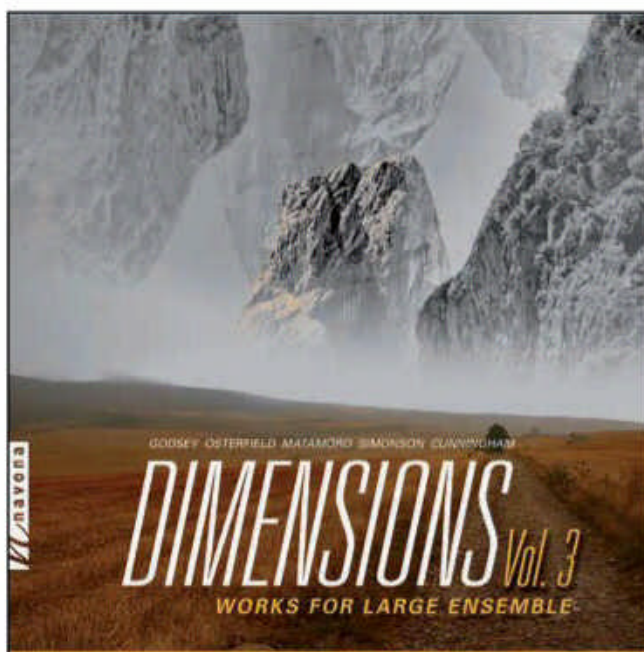
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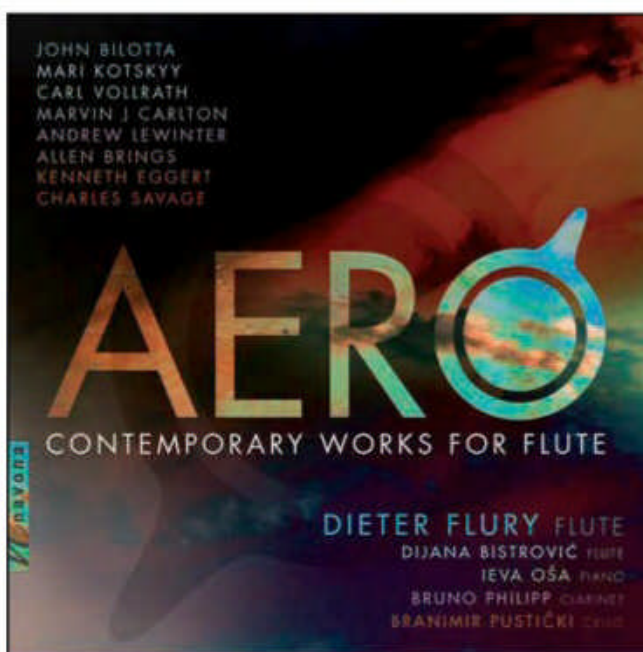


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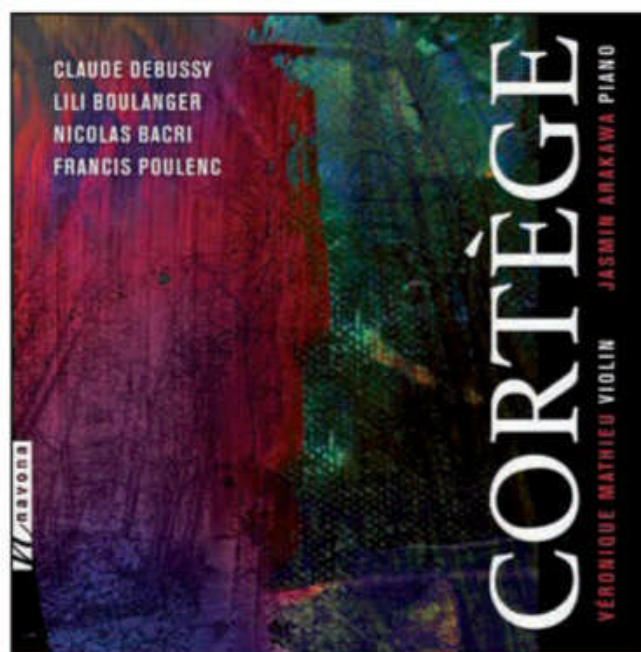
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Finesse and virtuosity: Aaron Tindall shines a light on the vibrant and poetic character of the tuba as a solo instrument – see review on page 1

Islands a narrative arc that lay ‘in the border zone between poetry and prose’. It remains a series of haunting sketches that depends on the narrator and in this, Picker’s plain American accents do not erase the memory of Sir John Gielgud’s deeply touching reading (Virgin, 7/91 – nla).

Thomas May’s detailed account of Picker’s working process makes the virtuoso performances by Giancarlo Guerrero and the commissioning Nashville Symphony, captured splendidly in the spatial beauties of Laura Turner Concert Hall, even more enjoyable.

Laurence Vittes

‘Aquarelles’

Damase *Sonate en concert*, Op 17

Gaubert *Trois Aquarelles*

Martinů *Trio*, H300 **Weber** *Trio*, Op 63

Bonita Boyd *fl* **Steven Doane** *vc* **Barry Snyder** *pf*

Bridge © BRIDGE9539 (72’ • DDD)



Original repertoire for flute, cello and piano is not as extensive as it might

be. Arrangements abound, as here with Philippe Gaubert’s *Three Aquarelles*, originally written for conventional piano trio in 1915 while on active service in the First World War. Weber’s more substantial trio (1818-19, though partly based on earlier material and containing allusions to his then still-unfinished opera *Der Freischütz* in the finale) was conceived for flute with cello and piano but is also well known – like Louise Farrenc’s wonderful *Trio* (1861-62) – in the alternative version with violin replacing flute.

Martinů’s *Trio* (1944) is one of the gems of his chamber music output and its three movements, a relatively brief prelude followed by two larger spans, open the programme in bracing fashion. Gaubert’s *Aquarelles* make for a startling contrast, though the first two movements (‘Par un clair matin’ and ‘Soir d’automne’) are close to the Impressionist style that characterised many of Martinů’s earlier works. Jean-Michel Damase’s music remains less well known outside his native France than it merits, and his *Sonate en concert* (1952) is typically and deceptively lightweight. It is not really a sonata at all, but rather a suite evoking Baroque models

with a catchy Rigaudon, brief recurring Aria and affecting Sicilienne, rounded off with a lively Gigue. It is less weighty than the Weber, for sure, but no worse for that.

These are beautifully poised performances. In the two *Trios*, Boyd, Doane and Snyder sparkle in the swifter outer movements but find plenty of lyricism in the slower central spans as well as the gentler trio sections in the scherzandos. There is a lovely and idiomatic blend of sonority in the *Aquarelles* and *Sonate en concert*, the latter spotlighting the trio’s fine mutual understanding. Bridge’s sound is a little flat but very clear. A very nicely balanced programme. **Guy Rickards**

‘E pluribus unum’

Auerbach *An Old Photograph* from the Grandparents’ Childhood

Clyne *On Track Czernowin* fardanceCLOSE

GL Frank *Karnavalito No 1* Ince Symphony

in Blue **Khaleghian** *Táhirih the Pure*

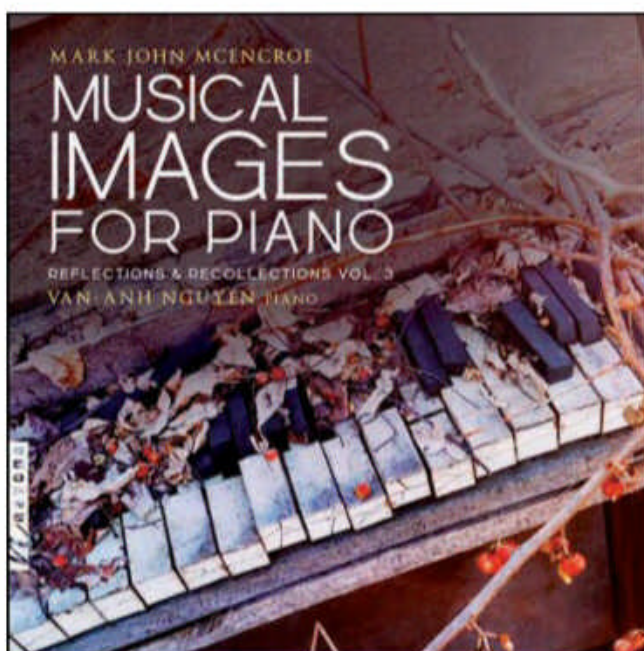
EY Lee Mool Moya *The Way North – No 4*,

La bestia; No 7, *Rain Outside the Church*

Ortiz Piglia

Liza Stepanova *pf*

Navona © NV6300 (69’ • DDD)

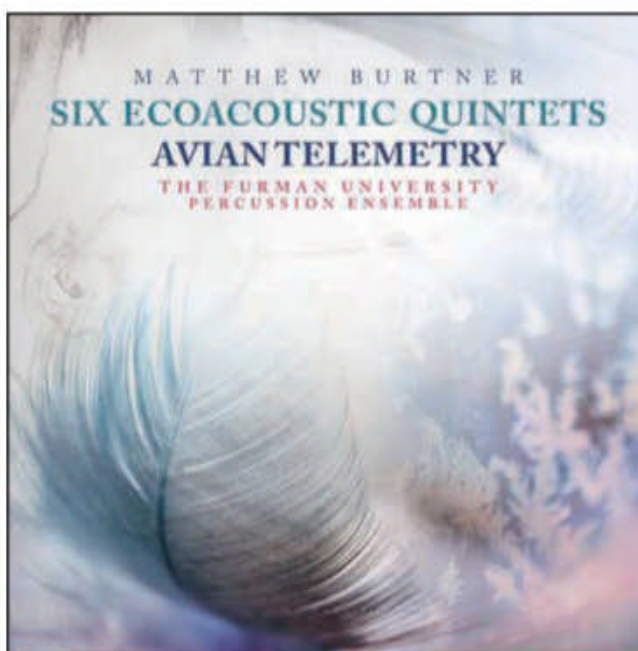


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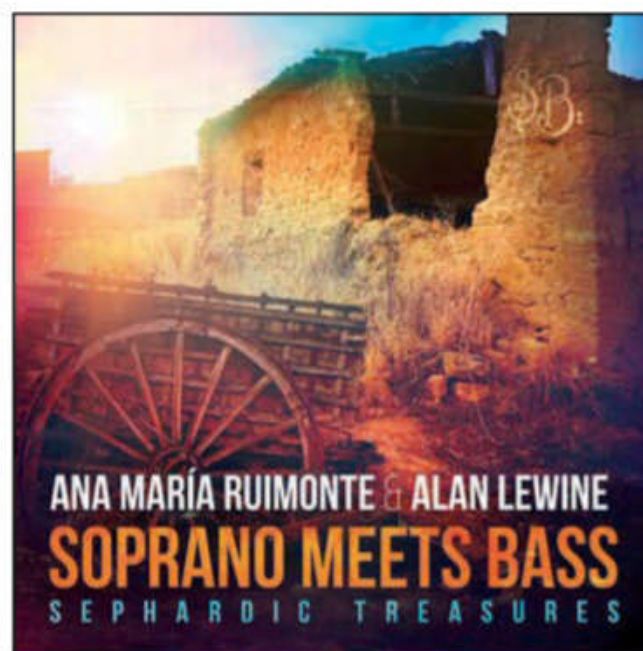


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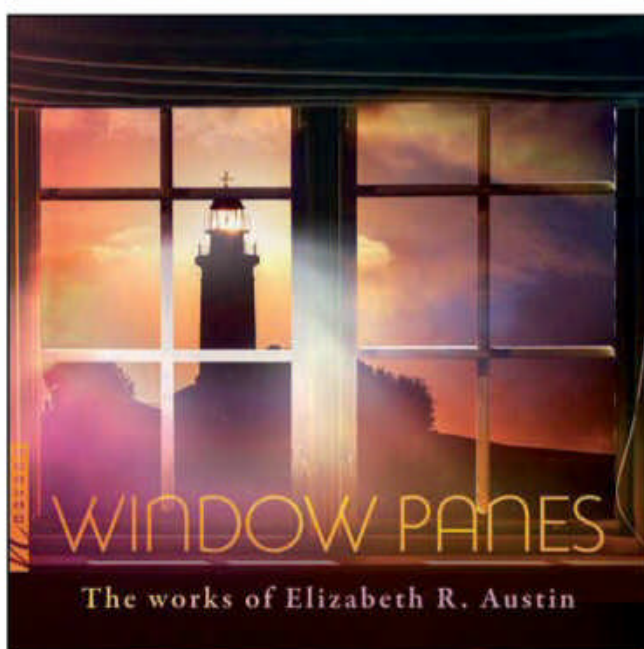
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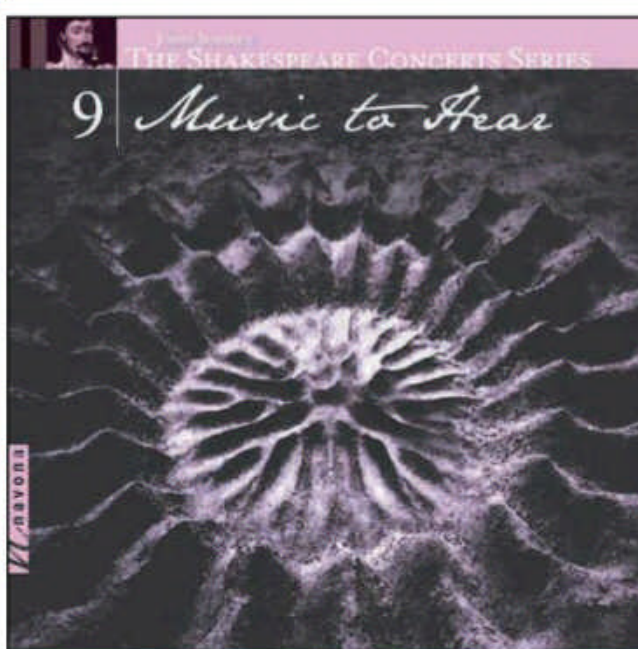
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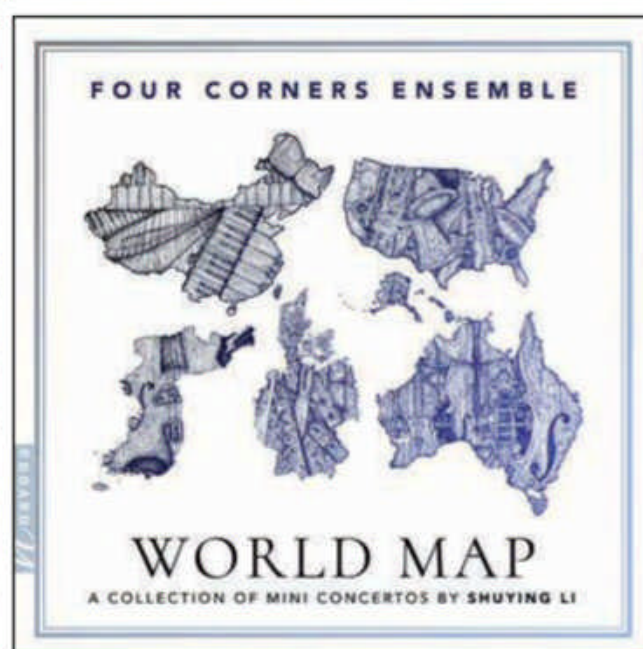
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Immigration is the backdrop to this programme of American piano

music, from the ethnic origins of the composers featured and, indeed, the pianist, to the album title ('out of many, one' in English). Liza Stepanova, Belarusian by birth, has curated a thoughtful and fascinating programme of music which, in one way or another, celebrates the heritage of each composer and their diversity in general. This ranges from the wistfully Stravinskian motion of Lera Auerbach's 'An Old Photograph from the Grandparents' Childhood' (one of 12 *Scenes from Childhood*, 2000) to the riotous Andean-Eastern European fusion of *Karnavalito No 1* (2013) by Gabriela

Lena Frank, of Peruvian, Chinese and Lithuanian Jewish ancestry. These bookend the disc.

The fractured flow of Chaya Czernowin's *fardanceCLOSE* (2012) and British-born Anna Clyne's *On Track* (2007) are the most advanced in technique, the former harmonically, the latter through its tape component, which manipulates harp figurations and a phrase from a speech by Queen Elizabeth II. The subject of Reinaldo Moya's *The Way North* (2017, like Auerbach's a cycle in 12 movements) is the act of migration itself: 'La bestia' ('The Beast') is a train used by migrants travelling through Mexico; 'Rain Outside the Church' depicts a shower along the way.

Inspirations vary. Pablo Ortiz's milonga-tango fusion honours the late Argentinian writer Ricardo Piglia (1941-2017). Eun Young Lee's *Mool* (Korean

for 'water'; 2012) is a tone-painting of Lake Michigan, although with resonances of Emily Dickinson, while Badie Khaleghian's large triptych *Táhirih the Pure* (2017) depicts the mystical poetess Táhirih, who inspired 19th-century Persian women to throw off religious subjugation. (The refusal of the Iranian government to allow Khaleghian's parents to attend his graduation in 2017 prompted this recording project.) Multiple playing techniques are used in this by turns dramatic yet meditative work, and (including vocalisations) in Kamran Ince's volatile, at times volcanic single-movement *Symphony in Blue* (2012), depicting Burhan Doğançay's vibrant artwork *Mavi Senfoni*. Stepanova brings remarkable commitment and impressive virtuosity to these performances. Particularly good sound, too. **Guy Rickards**

New World Center, Miami Beach

Our monthly guide to North American venues

Year opened 2011

Architect Frank Gehry

Capacity 756

Resident ensemble New World Symphony

From its opening on January 26, 2011, the New World Center, home to Michael Tilson Thomas's New World Symphony, was designed to create a bridge to classical music's future. Located in the colourful South Beach section of Miami Beach, and designed by Frank Gehry to be an audiophile venue in all of its many configurations, the 756-seat hall now stands as a beacon of how the beleaguered American orchestra industry can go forward.

Within its doors the Symphony coaches, rehearses and presents concerts. During the summer and for special events, virtual concerts are shown on a 7000 square-foot projection wall outside the building, with QR codes linked to programme notes.

When it opened with a concert of Wagner, the world premiere of Thomas Adès's *Polaris* (with a video by Tal Rosner) and Copland, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that it was 'not only shockingly immediate sonically but also the most sophisticated auditorium yet for assimilating video or film into a live musical experience'. And now the Center's multimedia virtues may have uniquely equipped it to face the Covid-19 challenge.

I heard the hall's acoustical range tested last October during the New World Symphony's 'Viola Visions', a five-day festival of concerts, masterclasses and seminars celebrating this most unlikely of audiophile instruments. Whether it was Cynthia Phelps playing Morton Feldman barefoot, or Tabea Zimmermann in a technicoloured gown playing Steven Mackey's brilliant fantasy on *Harold in Italy*, with a solo cello in the upper reaches of the hall, the sound was both larger than life and as intimate as a whisper – like the best sound systems enhanced by the sheer physical beauty and impact you only get live.



As Tilson Thomas described it to me: 'The number of seats in the halls may be small but there's so much space on the stage for even large orchestras that the audience has almost the experience of being inside of the orchestra. It's another kind of perspective – and another kind of excitement.'

Tilson Thomas agreed that the flexible hall might have been designed as a model of how to gradually transition to the now uncertain future. 'We thought out theoretically the numbers of players we could put in the different configurations, and we've pretty much figured out how to do it. The thing we don't know', he admitted, 'is how effective music-making will be even by excellent musicians when they are set over twice or three times the space they would normally be in. Nor what the impression audience members will have when they are themselves separated from other people.' **Laurence Vittes**

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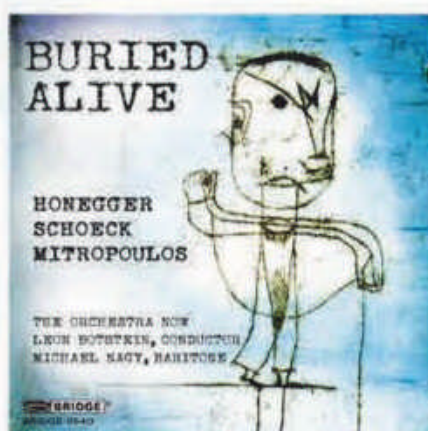
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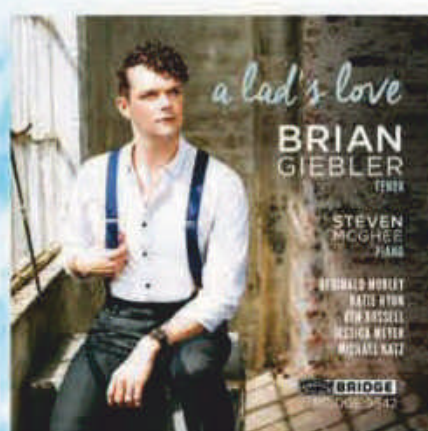
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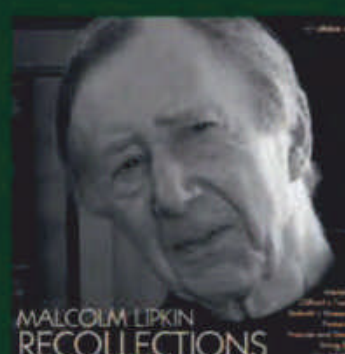
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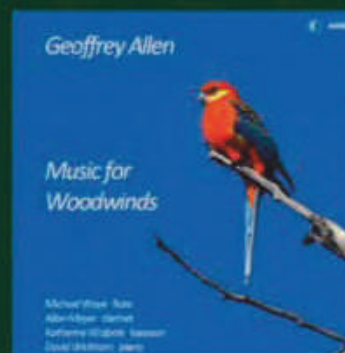
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A LETTER FROM *Kansas City*

Hilary Stroh offers some thoughts on what her city has lost and what it might gain in light of recent events



It very much felt like the ides of March. The Symphony had gotten off to a lively seasonal start, with robust dual celebrations of Beethoven and the centenary of Isaac Stern, father of Michael, the current maestro. The Ballet, for its part, had just presented *Swan Lake* for the second time in company history. The Lyric Opera was in the middle of its run of *Lucia di Lammermoor* when the crisis became unignorable. In retrospect, I couldn't help recalling the decadent wedding banquet scene – riven by the macabre appearance of Lucia as death personified – with a shiver of presentiment. As the city swiftly ordered the shut-down of all theatres, the last two performances were simply axed from the calendar. It's only fair, *en passant*, to honour what we subsequently missed, perhaps most harshly of all Paul Moravec's *The Shining* in May. In only its second iteration and newly revised, it is, according to the scheduled conductor, Gerard Schwarz, 'among the most important and brilliant contemporary operas'. The city's loss has been unambiguous.


This is not, as a result, the buoyant follow-up letter I could have imagined writing eight months ago but instead a much starker account of a city's resident arts organisations, reeling but still standing, in the wake of the pandemic, acutely aware of the fine balance now needed to be both artistically imaginative and shrewdly realistic in maintaining their art form in a radically altered world. Faced with abruptly plummeting budgets, absence of ticket revenue and massive uncertainty in the immediate and medium-term future, Deborah Sandler, General Director of the Lyric Opera, is under no false illusions: this is a time of painful but inevitable 'contraction'. There is, she adds, a 'long road ahead'. Jeff Bentley, Executive Director of the Ballet, for his part, speaks of the heartache of having to terminate positions and furlough staff in an intimate and close-knit community where nobody is faceless. Nonetheless, the leaders and members of these organisations are responding with characteristic spirit to the new dispensation.

The knack, as local baritone Daniel Belcher put it to me, is for companies to come across as 'proactive rather than reactive', to take this opportunity to explore the boundaries of what their art form can be. 'It's just too easy to disappear,' he says. Any limitation on public gatherings is going to act as a very uncomfortable constraint on art forms contingent on sociability alongside strangers, but constraint can be conducive to new kinds of creativity. While nothing grand-scale will be possible for a long

time – as Belcher wryly put it, 'you aren't going to get 2000 people crying together over *La bohème* any time soon' – now that lockdown has eased a little, companies are finding imaginative ways of taking music to people outdoors. In August the Lyric launched 'Soundscapes in the City', a series of pop-up concerts; the Symphony has quintets play at farmers' markets all over town. At the very least, these are ways of keeping our community artists and their music-making before the eyes of the local public, even a way of reaching a more diverse group of people.

There are even tentative plans to gather people to the smaller event spaces in the medium term: the Ballet, for example, hopes for a small-scale holiday performance at its production centre, while an equivalent initiative is plotted for the Opera. Locally based opera director Kathleen Belcher, who also works for the Met, is planning an innovative new project called 'Baseball Cabaret': she's enjoying a very new and different kind of project to her usual fare.

Arrested with Beethovenian abruptness, the Symphony, for its part, has carried on making music and conversations about music: its online presence has been particularly active. 'Your Symphony At Home' runs the gamut from the light-hearted to the serious. Spanning the spectrum is a new podcast, its irreverent title a nod to the Great Man himself: 'Beethoven Walks into a Bar'. Its episodes have been varied, from interviews with the Symphony's own librarian, who has the Herculean (and unseen) task of preparing and delivering thousands of scores, to an episode on the crossover between jazz and classical music, especially fitting in this city of bebop.

Although much remains grimly uncertain about the future, maybe organisations can use this moment as a reset. Back in March at *Lucia*, I remember finding it intriguing that around me in the stalls, the usual demographic had shifted in favour of diverse, bubbly 20-somethings. I remember thinking how oddly refreshing it felt for the first night at the opera to skew towards youth: there was an unmistakable vibe. And with all that has happened since, I think it's all the more pertinent for companies to ask themselves how they could make such positive change when the curtains rise again. How to woo the young, to make their conversion to the performative arts easier, or their commitment deeper? Do you mend your roof in a storm? No, but it's a good time to reflect deeply on what needs to be restructured. 

Although much remains grimly uncertain about the future, maybe organisations can use this moment as a reset

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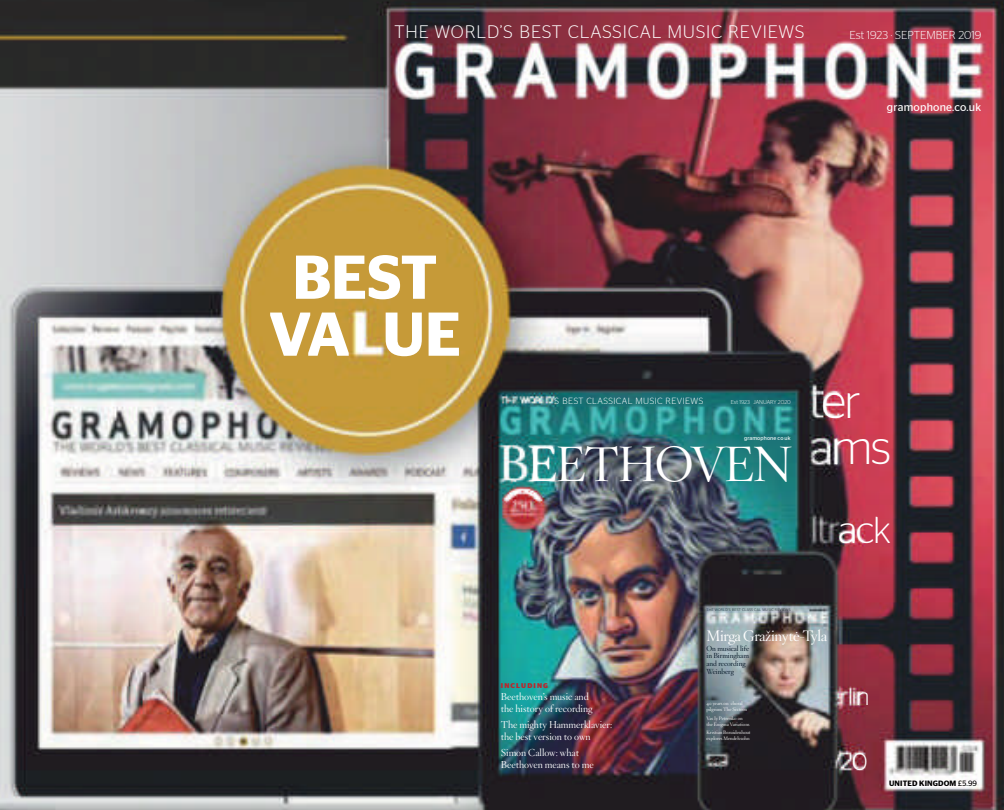
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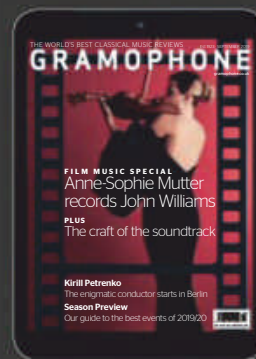
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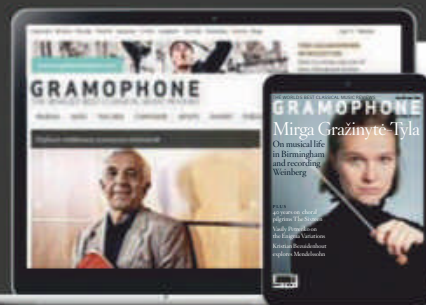
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Taking lessons from guitarist Julian Bream

I'd missed the news about Julian Bream's death. When this great figure of classical guitar, who had done so much to champion the instrument at a time when it was far from fashionable, died, I was in rural Scotland. After many months surrounded by concrete and the background buzz of a city never truly quiet regardless of what lockdown threw at it, it was a calming joy to be reconnected with the rhythms of the day, the space of the surrounding countryside and the expansive sky.

There was no phone or Wi-Fi signal – which swiftly reminded me how dependent I'd become on instant-access streaming services (though rather movingly in hindsight, of the only two albums I gratefully found downloaded on my phone, one was *Dreams & Fancies*, Sean Shibe's beautiful 2017 recording of works commissioned by Bream).

But this perhaps wasn't inappropriate. Bream had long balanced the exhausting life of touring with extended periods at home in the countryside, spent gardening, simply being settled. I visited him in 2013, when we gave him our Lifetime Achievement Award. Collecting me from the local station, he talked as he drove of the history of the lanes, anticipated every pothole it seemed, and later, just a ticking clock and the rustle of the breeze through the window as background for our interview, he at one point quietly reflected on the view outside, on how it changed through the day and seasons.

Though he could no longer play as he once could, he talked movingly of the rewards to be found on turning from player to listener. 'The older you get,



Martin Cullingford

the more things you find out, that you concentrate on. Something entices you – a phrase, a little rhythmic whatever – and you hear it repeated, an echo of something. I listen in a more acute way now.'

When a German ambassador, having heard him play, once insisted Bream must have Spanish heritage, the Battersea boy replied he was 'born between the Power Station and the Dog's Home'. These days that would potentially put you in a Frank Gehry penthouse, but for his era that reminds us of both Bream's down-to-earth connection to this country, and also that whatever its origins, great music transcends nationality. Thanks to Bream, his advocacy, his commissioning of British composers and his love of Elizabethan music, the Spanish guitar now feels just as much at home in Albion as in Iberia.

Bream was largely self-taught – and when it came to the lute some people, as he readily admitted, were 'suspect of his pedigree on it'. However, 'I was quite happy to be suspect,' he said, 'because I loved playing the instrument so much my way that to be honest I didn't really give a damn about anyone else. I knew that I was doing it for myself, and the interesting thing is that when you do things for yourself you stand a good chance of making other people happy.'

There are some useful lessons in here for all of us: slow down, reflect more, listen closer, and do what feels right to you regardless of what others say. And at a time when travel is restricted, remember that the international nature of music lies not in our ability to hop on a plane, but to journey in our minds and hearts.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'I've played through the odd *Goldberg* variation in my time', says **LINDSAY KEMP**, our cover story

author, 'but the only time I'll ever play them all will be in a dream. How wonderful, then, to be able instead to talk to four of the world's great pianists about their personal relationships with this masterpiece.'



'I've long admired Ermonela Jaho as a powerful performer on the operatic stage', writes **HUGO SHIRLEY**, who

interviews the soprano this issue. 'So it was fascinating to see her in action in the recording studio, and to discuss her new recording project, inspired by one of her great predecessors, Rosina Storchio.'



'I first heard Britten's *Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings* when I was 12', recalls **GERAINT LEWIS**,

who explores the recorded history of this extraordinary work in this month's Collection feature, 'and 50 years on it still fascinates and frightens, surprises and satisfies in equal measure.'

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Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows
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Volume 98 Number 1192

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GRAMOPHONE is published by
MA Music Leisure & Travel Ltd, St Jude's Church,
Dulwich Road, London SE24 0PB, United Kingdom.
gramophone.co.uk
email **gramophone@markallengroup.com** or
subscriptions@markallengroup.com
ISSN 0017-310X.

The October 2020 issue of *Gramophone* is on sale from
September 16; the Awards issue will be on sale from October 7
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in a future issue.

UK subscription rate £70.
Printed in England by Walstead Roche.

North American edition (ISSN 0017-310X):
Gramophone, USPS 881080, is published monthly with
an additional issue in October by MA Music Leisure
& Travel Ltd, St Jude's Church, Dulwich Road,
London SE24 0PB, United Kingdom. The US annual
subscription price is \$89. Airfreight and mailing in the
USA by agent named WN Shipping USA, 156-15, 146th
Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA. Periodicals
postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431. US Postmaster: Send
address changes to *Gramophone*, WN Shipping USA,
156-15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434,
USA. Subscription records are maintained at MA Music
Leisure & Travel Ltd, Unit A, Buildings 1-5 Dinton
Business Park, Catherine Ford Road, Dinton, Salisbury,
Wiltshire SP3 5HZ, UK. Air Business Ltd is acting as
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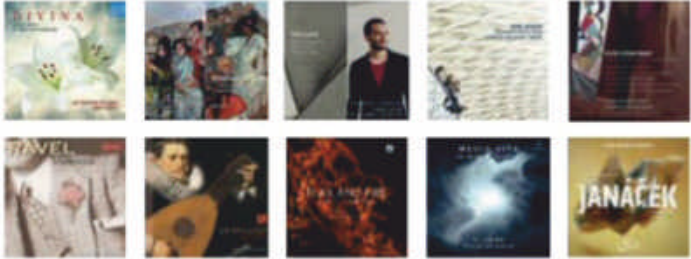
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Julian Bream
1933 – 2020



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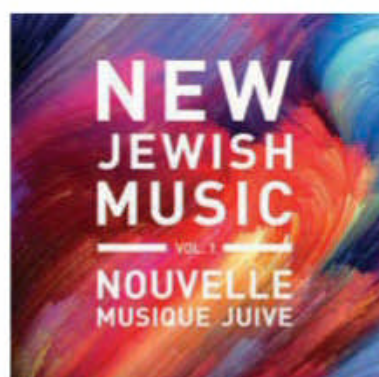
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GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BRITTEN

Peter Grimes
Sols incl Stuart Skelton; Bergen Philharmonic Choirs and Orchestra / Edward Gardner
Chandos
► **MIKE ASHMAN'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 32**

A powerful new recording of *Peter Grimes* from Stuart Skelton, one of today's leading interpreters of the title role, and a conductor, Edward Gardner, who perfectly understands Britten's music.



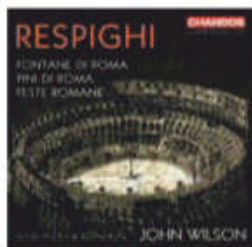
BEETHOVEN

Piano Concerto No 4
Kristian Bezuidenhout *fp*
Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi

Kristian Bezuidenhout delivers a thrilling performance of Beethoven's Fourth Concerto, alive to all its details.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 34**



RESPIGHI

Roman Trilogy
Sinfonia of London / John Wilson
Chandos
Another superb – and

sonically ravishing – recording from John Wilson and his hand-picked ensemble of superb players, the Sinfonia of London; Respighi performed with sheer delight.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 41**



SCHUMANN

Symphonies Nos 1 & 4
Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne / François-Xavier Roth
Myrios

François-Xavier Roth's ability to draw superb playing from whichever ensemble he's conducting has earned many Editor's Choices: this Schumann album reveals why.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 42**



DOWLAND

A Fancy
Bor Zuljan *lute*
Ricercar
A reflective, introspective and highly personal

performance of Dowland's music from Bor Zuljan, a lute player who draws deep emotions from both the music and his dark-toned instrument.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**

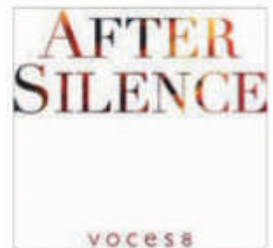


LISZT. THALBERG

Opera Transcriptions & Fantasies
Marc-André Hamelin *pf*
Hyperion
This is completely

compelling virtuosity from one of today's finest pianists – a supreme showcase for this repertoire, and a glorious listen from beginning to end.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 59**

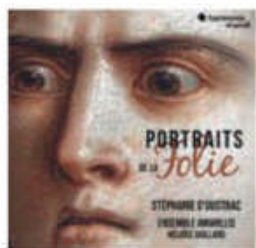


'AFTER SILENCE'

Voces8
Voces8
This is a very fine album from Voces8 – hugely varied in

scope, though thematically prepared so as to be inspiring, consoling and uplifting in equal measure, and exquisitely sung throughout.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**



'PORTRAITS DE LA FOLIE'

Stéphanie d'Oustrac
mez Ensemble Amarilliss / Héroïse Gaillard
Harmonia Mundi

'A typically enterprising recital' writes Richard Wigmore of Stéphanie d'Oustrac imaginative album – and it's as brilliantly performed as we might expect.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**



JANÁČEK

The Cunning Little Vixen
Sols; London Symphony Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle
LSO Live

Simon Rattle returns to *The Cunning Little Vixen* and offers an interpretation of vivid colour, with Lucy Crowe and Gerald Finley leading an impressive cast.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



SAINT-SAËNS

Le timbre d'argent
Sols; Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth
Bru Zane

François-Xavier Roth's second Editor's Choice slot this month, here with Les Siècles exploring a rarely heard Saint-Saëns opera alongside excellent soloists and the choir Accentus.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**



DVD/BLU-RAY

BEETHOVEN Piano Concerto No 4
BRUCKNER Symphony No 7
Emanuel Ax *pf* Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Bernard Haitink
Unitel

A performance of Bruckner steeped in the wisdom of a lifetime.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 35**



REISSUE/ARCHIVE

SMETANA Libuše
Václav Talich

Supraphon

An important addition to Václav Talich's Smetana music on record, one taken from performances in 1939: 'a historic recording', writes Rob Cowan in *Replay*, in the sense of 'history being made'.

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**

FOR THE RECORD

The great guitarist Julian Bream has died

Julian Bream, who has died aged 87, was a towering figure in the 20th-century classical guitar world, a musician whose dedication to his instrument left its reputation and repertoire infinitely stronger than it was when, aged 11, he first took it up. His legacy can be found in many modern works commissioned from some of the era's leading composers, in a richly rewarding recording catalogue, and arguably in the number of young soloists whose path today is much smoother thanks to Bream's dogged determination to forge the instrument the place in classical music it deserves.

Yet it was on piano that Battersea-born Bream won a junior exhibition to the Royal College of Music, with cello as his second instrument – the guitar wasn't yet taught there. National Service was spent mostly with the Royal Artillery, where he played in the jazz band. A Wigmore Hall debut in 1951 was followed by a decade of increasing popularity for the instrument, which in turn led to greater opportunities to perform, and by the 1960s Bream was touring abroad for a substantial part of each year.

The early 1950s also saw two significant encounters for Bream. One was with Elizabethan music, which he discovered in 1950. After initially transcribing it for guitar, it led him to learn the lute and later create an Early Music consort which bore his name. He admitted that some were 'suspect of my pedigree on the lute and its music', though equally adamant he didn't care. He certainly did much to increase interest in the lute and the era's music, and his approach merely reflected something which lay at the heart of his music-making: an extraordinary intuitive musicality. 'I never had to think about the interpretation of a Dowland galliard or pavane, I knew instinctively what to do,' he told *Gramophone* in a 2013 podcast. 'Now of course that wasn't very scholarly – but I'm an instinctive player'. He was, though his playing – on both lute and guitar – was no less immaculately prepared and brilliant for all that. His technical virtuosity was always paired with an extraordinary awareness of colour; in Bream's hands the guitar's both beauty and earthiness were woven into a tapestry of deep expressiveness.



Julian Bream: a dedicated guitar champion

The other encounter was with the tenor Peter Pears, with whom Bream was often to perform, and in 1963 Pears's partner Benjamin Britten would write *Nocturnal after John Dowland* for Bream, one of the most significant of 20th-century guitar works. Indeed, Bream was directly responsible for commissioning new pieces from composers including William Walton (*Five Bagatelles*), Malcolm Arnold (*The Blue Guitar*), Lennox Berkeley, Alan Rawsthorne, Richard Rodney Bennett and Hans Werner Henze. In retirement he was particularly pleased to have persuaded Harrison Birtwistle to have written for the guitar, commissioned through his Trust which also supports young players.

Another fine collaboration – which like that with Pears can be enjoyed on record – was with that other guitar icon of the age, John Williams.

Though presented by some as rivals, in truth their friendship and different styles simply made them delightful duet partners. 'It was really stimulating musically, and great fun,' recalled Bream.

But for all the embrace of the soloist's life, there was another, reflective and quiet side to Bream; months of the year would be spent quietly in his rural Wiltshire house, gardening and reconnecting with the slower pace of the passing seasons. Bream invited luthiers to base themselves in a workshop in the grounds. Most of his recordings were also made in this idyllic area of England, in a nearby chapel, and edited in an annex of his house. The arrangement suited an artist who, when asked if he enjoyed recording, admitted 'I cannot say that I did – but on the other hand I knew it was something that I had to do.' If there was something he wanted to do differently, he could simply pop back into the chapel that evening. 'It was a wonderful way of making records', he said. The result was a treasureable and impressively comprehensive survey of the guitar repertoire, most of which was recorded for RCA between 1960 and 1990 and lovingly repackaged in a Sony Classical box-set issued to mark Bream's 80th birthday in 2013, the same year that *Gramophone* bestowed its Lifetime Achievement Award on this remarkable musician.

Born July 15, 1933; died August 14, 2020

Two new pianist box-sets from Pires, Kempff and DG

There are two pianist box-sets from DG to look forward to. The first collects the complete DG recordings by Maria João Pires, who announced her retirement in 2017. Spanning 38 discs, and including solo, chamber and concerto albums, this set reveals the breadth of Pires's musicianship, with the focus not surprisingly centred on her musical loves of Mozart, Chopin, Schubert and Schumann. As well as her Mozart piano sonatas and celebrated sets of Chopin Nocturnes and Schubert Impromptus, Pires's treasured chamber collaborations make up a sizeable



chunk of the set, reminding us of her sensitive and responsive music-making, not least with the violinist Augustin Dumay.

In October DG is releasing the complete recordings by Wilhelm Kempff on 80 discs. Alongside his surveys of solo Bach, Beethoven, Schubert and Schumann are three complete cycles of Beethoven's piano concertos. The set contains Kempff's complete LP recordings, and a selection of his 78s, including the pre-war and wartime Beethoven recordings.

Both sets will be reviewed in forthcoming issues of *Gramophone*.



Watch the winners!

A number of exciting announcements and publications in the coming weeks lead us up to the *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards. Turn to page 28 of this issue to see the three shortlisted recordings in each category, and on September 22 log on to *Gramophone's* website to find out which 10 albums triumphed. Then finally, on October 6, you

can find out which was voted Recording of the Year 2020 at a special online ceremony, where we will also reveal the recipients of the Special Awards, including Artist of the Year, Lifetime Achievement and – as voted for by you – our Orchestra of the Year. Watch it on our website or at Medici.tv – and then the following day make sure you pick up your special celebratory Awards issue for full coverage of the most extraordinary artists and albums of the past year.

Imogen Cooper honoured

Pianist Imogen Cooper has received Her Majesty's Medal for Music for the year. Cooper is the 15th recipient of the Award, established in 2005 by former Master of The Queen's Music, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, and awarded to an individual or ensemble who have had a major influence on the musical life of the nation. It's chaired by today's holder of the post, composer Judith Weir, who said 'A historically important British solo pianist, Imogen Cooper has devoted her extensive, and ongoing, performing career to her repertoire, richly upholding the values of classical music as an inspiration to listeners and colleagues worldwide.'



ONE TO WATCH

Parker Ramsay Harp

It's unusual for a harpist to feature in this slot, although in truth Parker Ramsay is a man of many talents. At the age of 17 he was awarded the Organ Scholarship at King's College, Cambridge – the first American to hold this post – where he served under the direction of the late Stephen Cleobury. As well as a degree in history, he has master's degrees in historical keyboards (Oberlin Conservatory) and harp performance (Juilliard).

The son of a harpist and a trombonist, Ramsay grew up in rural Tennessee, where he studied the harpsichord, organ and harp. In his role as Organ Scholar at King's he has featured on various King's College Choir recordings, but his first solo album is as a harpist, and is a very particular kind of calling card. Ramsay has arranged Bach's *Goldberg Variations* for modern pedal harp, striving for an 'ideal' realisation of this masterpiece, with, as he has put it, 'the raw pluckiness of the harpsichord, but with the expressive qualities of the piano'. The results are intriguing, revealing and rather beautiful. The album, on King's College's own label, is



released on September 18 and will be reviewed next issue.

It seems that Ramsay's career could take him in any number of directions, possibly simultaneously. His next recording will be a solo harp album of contemporary music, which we can look forward to in late 2021.

GRAMOPHONE Online

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit gramophone.co.uk for ...

Podcasts

The *Gramophone* Podcast continues with interviews with Robin Ticciati, Alondra de la Parra and Eric Whitacre. Ticciati, Principal Conductor of the DSO Berlin, has just released a Richard Strauss album that couples two tone-poems, *Don Juan* and *Tod und Verklärung*, with the six songs, Op 68, often called the *Brentano* songs, sung by Louise Alder. As Ticciati rehearsed



Eric Whitacre features on the Gramophone Podcast

at Glyndebourne for the much reduced 2020 season, James Jolly caught up with him to talk about the new album. Alondra de la Parra, keen to raise money to support charities in Mexico working to help women and children suffering abuse and violence during the pandemic, has created The Impossible Orchestra. With musicians from 14 different countries and recorded for video as well as audio, the orchestra is a stellar line-up of artists. Eric Whitacre talks about his new work *The Sacred Veil*, which he has recorded with the Los Angeles Master Chorale for Signum Classics.

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GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

Lied

Richard Wigmore offers a historical overview of a classic Germanic genre

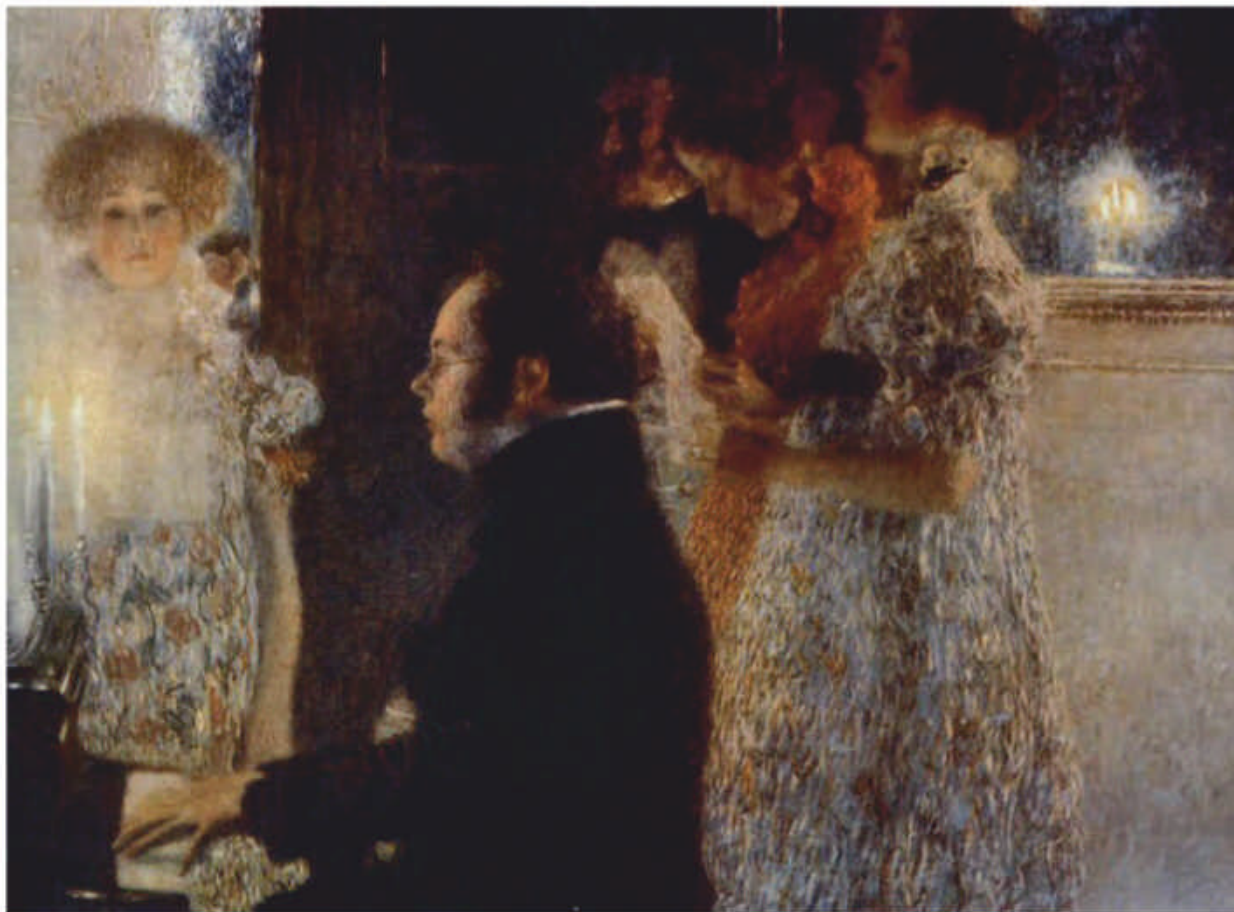
While Lied means, simply, ‘song’, the word has come to denote a piano-accompanied Romantic song: the German equivalent of the French *mélodie*, with twin sources in the operatic aria and folksong.

Centuries before Schubert, the term first became current in the secular Lieder by the Tyrolean poet-composer of courtly love, Oswald von Wolkenstein (c1377-1445). From the mid-15th century musicians including Heinrich Isaac cultivated the sub-genre of the Tenorlied. Tenor here signifies not the tenor voice but a borrowed melody, around which the other voices wove counterpoints. Synthesising Italian and German styles, Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612) brought a new variety and expressive warmth to the Lied c1600. His love song ‘G’müt ist in mir verwirret’ became associated with the chorale ‘O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden’ familiar from Bach’s *St Matthew Passion*.

With the rise of domestic music-making came a vogue for the solo strophic Lied accompanied by continuo. Its most gifted exponent was Adam Krieger (1634-66), whose subjects range from pastoral idylls to ribald drinking songs. A century later, encouraged by Frederick the Great, a group of Berlin composers composed Lieder predicated on simple, folk-like melody which could be sung with or without a rudimentary keyboard accompaniment.

Later in the century the leading composers of the so-called ‘Second Berlin School’, Johann Reichardt and Carl Friedrich Zelter, were more discerning in their choice of verses and musically more inventive. Their finest Goethe songs, including Reichardt’s turbulent ‘Rastlose Liebe’, can stand alongside Schubert.

Mozart, whose *Das Veilchen* is effectively a miniature opera scena, and Haydn wrote Lieder that go beyond mere charm. But the game changed with Beethoven’s Liederkreis (song-cycle) *An die ferne Geliebte* – an unbroken chain of six songs – and the songs of the teenaged Schubert. His 1814 setting of Goethe’s ‘Gretchen am Spinnrade’ – a landmark in the history of the Lied – combines vivid pictorial



The genre of the Lied reached its apogee with the 600-plus songs of Franz Schubert


detail with searing psychological truth. The keyboard simultaneously evokes the spinning wheel and each shade of Gretchen’s ecstatic agitation.

Schubert’s 600-plus songs range from folklike naïvety (say, ‘Heidenröslein’), through powerful ballads (‘Erlkönig’, ‘Der Zwerg’) to grand, operatically conceived narratives like ‘Die junge Nonne’ and the two great cycles of lost love: *Die schöne Müllerin* and the bleakly existential *Winterreise*. Schubert’s contemporary Carl Loewe specialised in the picturesque ballad, often (as in ‘Erlkönig’) with a grisly final twist.

In subtle, seemingly intuitive interpenetration of poetry and music, Schubert’s true successor was Robert Schumann. A master of suggestion within a tiny span, Schumann tends to take the piano as his starting point. His reflective piano postludes – most movingly in the bittersweet Heine cycle *Dichterliebe* – at once encapsulate and deepen the poem’s meaning.

The two outstanding Lied composers of the later 19th century were polar opposites. For Brahms, irresistibly drawn

to poems of nostalgia and unrequited love, melody, often luxuriant and long-arched, came first, poetic quality second. Many of his Lieder fuse folk song and art song. The Wagner-worshipping Hugo Wolf chose his poems fastidiously (as in his Mörike and Goethe songbooks), and sought to mirror faithfully their verbal music. A characteristic Wolf song sets a freely evolving, sometimes fragmentary vocal line against a motivic piano part (accompaniment is quite the wrong word here) replete with post-*Tristan* chromaticism.

The genre survived into the early 20th century in the songs of Richard Strauss, Mahler, Berg and Schoenberg. Beginning with *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* – a spring counterpart to *Winterreise* – Mahler’s piercing orchestral song cycles took the Lied out of the drawing room and into the concert hall. Despite spasmodic examples from mid-century (including the politically charged songs of Hans Eisler), the Lied tradition effectively ended in 1948 with Strauss’s sumptuous *Vier letzte Lieder*: a valediction, and a glorious consummation. 

ARTISTS & their INSTRUMENTS

Hidan Mamudov on his kaval

“The kaval is a wooden, hollow-tubed instrument with a cylindrical bore. It's edge-blown, which means that you play it on the side of your mouth, although you hold it pointing down. As a member of the flute family, it's a very old instrument – as old as humanity itself. I remember when I was studying in Vienna, and I saw a picture of a bone flute that was 35,000 years old.

The kaval is made from wood from the Cornelian cherry tree – a very strong wood. It has four holes for the left hand, and four for the right. There are a further four holes at the bottom, but these are for acoustical purposes only. With overblowing, its range can cover up to three octaves.

The kaval is the national instrument of Macedonia so I grew up hearing it. Like all of us performing on 'Makedonissimo,' we have been familiar with the folk music of our country since childhood. Simon [Trpčeski]'s first instrument was the accordion, so for him, especially, this project was about going back to his roots, to his first love [he plays both piano and accordion on the album, and also sings]. The idea was to achieve the authentic sound picture of Macedonian traditional music.

But I'm a clarinetist, and when Simon told me about this project and asked me, 'Can you play the kaval?', I had to say that although I'd heard it as a child, and knew how it should sound, I'd never actually picked one up. But I said I'd sacrifice myself for this project! So I taught myself to play it – it took a year. A friend of mine in Vienna is a professional kaval player so I asked him to find me an instrument, and he ordered me one from the kaval maker Yordan Vasilev. It arrived in 2016, about 12 months before our first 'Makedonissimo' concert.

I started with the sound. I've always liked the sound of the kaval – it's very personal, very warm, and you can understand why, historically, it was used as a shepherd's flute. From my childhood, I remember hearing folk stories accompanied by the kaval, and that sound picture stayed with me. But I have to admit that breathing was, and is, a challenge. You need much more air than for the clarinet, and even then the sound is not so big. Switching from clarinet, or saxophone, to kaval – as I do on the recording – was probably the most challenging aspect, because the required embouchures are so different.

As a folk instrument, the kaval is meant to be played with other folk instruments. But on 'Makedonissimo,' I'm playing with violin, cello, piano, percussion ... if you have to fight to be heard on the kaval, you can have problems with intonation. But luckily Pande Shahov's arrangements are very good because the sound texture is always thinner when the kaval is playing. I think we really made the best of putting this really traditional instrument into such a modern ensemble. We also had great fun recording the album, because we have all known each other for 20 years or more, so whenever we performed the programme, it was such a warm atmosphere – like being with your family. So many concerts were cancelled due to the pandemic, but hopefully we'll continue to tour the programme in the future because it's such a pleasure to perform and travel with my friends.”

'Makedonissimo', featuring Mamudov on kaval, is reviewed on page 52



Louise Alder joins Robin Ticciati and *Gramophone's* Orchestra of the Year nominee, DSO Berlin, to perform a captivating programme of Richard Strauss.



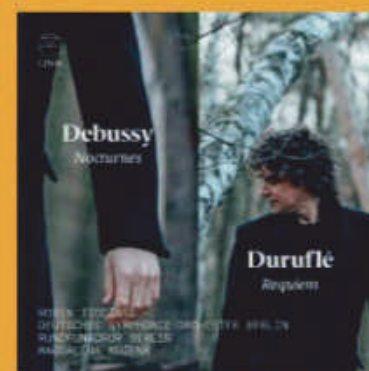
CKD 640

*Tod und Verklärung, Don Juan,
Sechs Lieder, Op. 68*

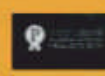
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Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

Founded 1986

Residencies Southbank Centre, Glyndebourne, King's Place

Associated conductors Iván Fischer, Simon Rattle, Vladimir Jurowski, Roger Norrington

Start-up orchestras using period-specific instruments were two-a-penny in the 1980s. But they were invariably fashioned in the image of the individual musicians who established, funded and conducted them. Fearful that a new set of orthodoxies was creeping in and suspicious that a single peripatetic posse of early musicians was servicing the egos of a handful of conductors, a group of those musicians went it alone. They founded the first self-governing period-instrument orchestra in Britain.

A few unwritten principles lay behind the establishment of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment in 1986. The first was a simple 'question everything'. The next was a promise to look beyond the confines of the early music scene for its collaborators and conductors. The last, paradoxically for an orchestra with its name and methods, was to consider everything it did in terms of the present, not the past. The instruments don't really matter, the OAE was soon saying; it's the philosophy that counts. That has made them impossible to second-guess and intriguing to listen to in music from Biber to Wagner and far beyond, which it increasingly contextualises with lectures and debates that reflect broad seasonal themes rooted in enlightenment values. The OAE was the first British orchestra to present a series of performances in pubs, for which it surreptitiously dropped its convoluted name.

Judiciously chosen conductors have long ensured the OAE continues to push itself, as does its occasional decision to



perform without one at all (it has twice presented the *St Matthew Passion* this way). Still suspicious of the corrupting power of the maestro, the OAE has a shortlist it calls upon – for a time they could call themselves 'principal artists' but that apparently proved too accommodating – with a special affection for Iván Fischer, Vladimir Jurowski, Mark Elder and Simon Rattle.

The latter relationship has been the most pivotal. Rattle insisted on using the ensemble for Mozart operas at Glyndebourne in the late 1980s, thus cementing not just one of its most lucrative residencies but probably its entire future. He took the orchestra through its first Wagner (*Das Rheingold* in 2004), a strand that would have been augmented with *Tristan* under Iván Fischer had Covid-19 not intervened. Opera is also where the OAE has come to exert most influence on the recording catalogue, with repertoire from Purcell to Rossini lauded and awarded by *Gramophone* recently. As for an OAE 'sound', that's difficult to discuss; the moment this orchestra starts to sound like itself, it rushes hastily in the opposite direction. **Andrew Mellor**

Sony's new harpist

Sony Music Masterworks has signed harpist Cecilia De Maria. UK-born to Maltese parents, De Maria entered the Purcell School at the age of 11 before moving on to the Royal College of Music. She made her concerto debut in 2008 with the LSO and that year also made the string finals of BBC Young Musician, where she received the Walter Todds bursary. Indicating her wide appeal, appearances since have included at the Brit Awards alongside Dizzee Rascal and Florence and the Machine, and in a Walkers' Crisps advert for Comic Relief alongside Stephen Fry and Gary Lineker. Sony promises us 'a range of new works written especially for this talented and versatile musician, including works by composers of the moment, together with unique arrangements of classical pieces for harp'.



Hannigan brings Momentum

Barbara Hannigan has launched an initiative to support young artists in the wake of Covid-19's impact on performing arts. Called Momentum, it will see leading soloists and conductors bringing younger colleagues into main stage professional engagements: young soloists sharing the stage on leading artist's engagements, or young conductors assisting

rehearsals. In each case the young artist will receive a fee. 'I have experienced such generosity in my own career, and like many artists I'm passionate about giving back,' said the soprano and conductor (pictured, right). 'Creating an initiative where we are collectively uniting to share the stage with our younger colleagues, now and in the future, has long-term benefits for all.' A huge number of leading soloists and conductors have signed up to the scheme. It's set to launch on August 29 at Snape Maltings, with Sir Antonio Pappano creating a place on the programme for Ukrainian baritone, Yuriy Yurchuk, accompanying him on piano.



Julian Lloyd Webber steps down

Julian Lloyd Webber is leaving his role as Principal of the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. In recognition of his five-year tenure – during which time he oversaw the move to a new £57m building and the organisation granted Royal status – the cellist has been given the status of Emeritus Professor. Under his leadership the Conservatoire forged a partnership with Naxos for a series of recordings featuring Conservatoire students, while Junior Department student pianist Lauren Zhang won the BBC Young Musician competition.

FROM WHERE I SIT

Sharing admiration about great conductors prompts memories for Edward Seckerson



In a recent and far-reaching exchange with the conductor John Wilson (for an audio podcast to be found on YouTube) the names George Szell and Sir John Barbirolli (celebrated in the July edition) dominated our conversation at one point. A shared enthusiasm to be sure. We lost them both in the very same week back in 1970 and while Wilson didn't have my memories of seeing them both in action (too young) there were key recordings that had inspired him over the years. One was Barbirolli's famous disc of English string music with the Sinfonia of London (now gloriously reincarnated by Wilson) and Szell's jaw-dropping account (with his Cleveland Orchestra) of Walton's Second Symphony. It's a work Wilson has been looking at (indeed all of Walton) in his ongoing exploration of repertoire despite knowing – as with Previn's LSO account of the First Symphony – that it was unlikely to be bettered in terms of sheer brilliance and precision. It elevates the piece in ways that one couldn't begin to imagine.

Szell was in my experience unforgettable live in ways that many of his recordings simply cannot convey. This Walton Second was an exception, as were the Schumann symphonies, his Vienna Philharmonic disc on Decca of Beethoven's Incidental Music to *Egmont*, and a Mahler *Knaben Wunderhorn* with Schwarzkopf and Fischer-Dieskau. There was also a Tchaikovsky Fourth with the LSO which for some reason had to wait years for release. Perhaps Szell wasn't happy with it (he was famously both a

perfectionist and a firebrand) and refused to sign off on it in his lifetime? But live – my goodness, that was another story. I remember an unforgettable Mahler Sixth with the London Philharmonic and the most thrilling Beethoven Ninth with the Philharmonia – never equalled in my experience. Janet Baker was the alto soloist and she recalls how very tricky he was until you learned how to handle him. Visits with his own Cleveland Orchestra were also memorable (a Barber Piano Concerto with John Browning) though I could never understand why Szell, a Hungarian, insisted on making a disfiguring cut in the last movement of Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra (the whole of that extraordinary passage where the music gathers energy towards the big restatement of the coda). But he and Barbirolli were special in such different ways. You could feel it even before a single note was sounded. Sometimes the mystical quality of a performance – like Barbirolli's *Tallis Fantasia* – is already signalled in the silence before the first downbeat.

Returning to Walton, I have a little story. Working my Saturday job as a teenager in the record department of a well known store I looked up one day to find the man himself standing before me and asking in that well-rounded voice of his if I had 'Previn's recording of Walton's Second Symphony'. On composing myself I handed him a copy and nervously said 'I think you'll be well pleased Sir William'. He smiled at the recognition though little did he know that what I actually wanted to say was 'It isn't a patch on the Szell and certainly not a patch on Previn's account of the First but still well worth hearing.' The critic in me remained muted. **G**

ONE COULD DISCUSS AT LENGTH WHERE – IN THE FIELD BETWEEN THE EXCEPTIONAL AND THE MAGNIFICENT – LANG LANG POSITIONS HIMSELF WITH HIS INTERPRETATION OF THE GOLDBERG VARIATIONS.
Leipziger Volkszeitung

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SCALING *the* GOLDBERGS



Owing to its Himalayan presence, Bach's set of 30 keyboard variations is a daunting prospect for any recording artist.

Lindsay Kemp speaks to Lang Lang – whose first recording of the work has just been released – and three of his fellow pianists about interpretation and courage, and how timing is everything

B

ach remains the god who diverts himself and makes child's play of everything. But we, poor creatures, where can we find brain, heart and muscles *à la hauteur* to such a degree?' The great harpsichord pioneer Wanda Landowska wrote this in 1933, the year of her first recording of Bach's 'Aria with Diverse Variations, for the Harpsichord with Two Manuals. Composed for Music Lovers, to Refresh their Spirits' – otherwise known as the *Goldberg Variations*. She was one of the earliest artists to raise awareness of what was then a bit of a forgotten masterpiece, but nearly 90 years later it has become a keyboard icon. Surely there is no one

with any meaningful acquaintance with Bach's music who doesn't see this miraculous creation towering over the landscape with the same Himalayan presence as the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the *St Matthew Passion* or the solo violin and solo cello music; and can there be a pianist or harpsichordist unaware of its position as a cornerstone of the keyboard repertoire?

To this day there have been more than 600 recordings made of the *Goldbergs*, but with its 30 variations encompassing nearly 80 minutes' worth of virtuoso brilliance, miraculous canons and moments of superhuman beauty, it still presents a daunting project to artists of all calibres – one it would be ill-advised to take lightly. This is the kind of piece players can live with for years without ever feeling as if they have reached into its depths, a work that can make them feel that they have never got it entirely right. How, then, to decide on the ideal moment to commit it to record?

'If I'd kept putting the Goldbergs back I'd probably never have had the guts to do it!' – Lang Lang

For Lang Lang, whose new recording of it is reviewed in this issue, it's a piece that has sat with him for a long time. 'I've played it for more than 20 years,' he tells me. 'In fact, I learnt it when I was 10 years old, and by 17 I had already played it in front of other musicians.' The *Goldbergs* did not subsequently feature on his public recital programmes, but now, aged 38, he feels the right time has come. 'I was hugely influenced as a kid by listening to Glenn Gould, which gave me a fantastic dream to do this piece. So I've always thought about performing it, and for the last 10 years I've wanted to record it, but I kept thinking at the last minute, "Let's wait another year – prepare better!" But now is a good time. I love the piece so much, and if I'd kept putting it back I'd probably never have had the guts to do it!'

BEATRICE RANA'S STORY: ANOTHER EARLY STARTER

The story of learning the *Goldbergs* at a young age with a view to laying it up for later is not unique. Not that everyone keeps it back as long as Lang Lang has. The young Italian pianist Beatrice Rana likewise learnt it while still a child. 'One of my very first concerts in public, when I was 10, was an all-Bach recital, and in it I played the Aria from the *Goldberg Variations*,' she confides. 'Afterwards, my teacher said to me, "Just as an exercise, let's beat the *Goldbergs*! Bring one variation to each lesson." That was the beginning, but it was not meant to be played in concert, it was just for our private practice. So I read all of them, then left them. After a few years, when I was 17, my teacher said, "Wouldn't it be nice to play the *Goldbergs*

PHOTOGRAPHY: STEFAN HOEDERATH

again?” So I picked up the book and started to practise, but I had to admit that I didn’t feel ready, it was too much. I couldn’t deal with the piece. But the score remained on the piano.’

Rana spent the next few years on the competition circuit, which culminated with her winning the Silver Medal at the Cliburn Competition in 2013. ‘The day after, I was like, “OK, I don’t have to learn anything for competitions any more, what do I really want to do?” And the first answer was the *Goldbergs*, because that piece was always with me.’ In November 2016, at the age of 23, Rana recorded the work – her first solo release. ‘With these massive masterpieces you have to start young in order to grow up with them and have the time to change opinions. And this is the kind of music that’s so full of ideas, so majestic in its architecture, that you understand more about it as time goes on. I know that even now, just four years later, I would do things differently.’



Rana in ‘Duets and Solos’ at this year’s Ravenna Festival: she opened the dance event with the *Goldbergs*’ Aria

ANGELA HEWITT: UNDAUNTED TEEN

Rana is still only 27, but it is understandable that recording a piece such as this 13 years after learning it should seem to her ‘not so soon’. Yet even as distinguished a Bach pianist as Angela Hewitt waited nearly twice as long before committing the *Goldbergs* to disc in 1999. In contrast to Rana’s experience, it was a competition that caused her to learn the piece. ‘I can see that it was in October 1974,’ she recalls, after consulting the battered and much annotated score she used then and still uses now. ‘I was 16 years old and learnt it because there was a Bach competition in Washington DC in the summer of 1975 and it was the test piece. We had to play up to Variation 15 in the first round, from 16 to the end in the second, and the complete thing in the final round. So my teacher gave it to me and said, “I wouldn’t normally give this to a student of your age, but you already have a mind for Bach.” And I’m forever grateful, because when you learn a piece at that age it sticks with you for the rest of your life. You know, you can get up and play it in the middle of the night.’

Perhaps Hewitt is referencing the story behind the unusual original title of this piece, related in 1802 by the composer’s first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel. Forkel tells us that Johann Gottlieb Goldberg, a highly talented pupil of Bach, was living in the household of Count Keyserlingk, the Russian ambassador to the court of Saxony in Dresden, and that Keyserlingk, an insomniac, asked Bach to write some pieces for Goldberg to play to him ‘that he might be a little cheered up by them in his sleepless nights’. The story has long had its doubters, not least because Goldberg was possibly as young as 14 when the variations were published in 1741. But as we have seen, the music is not beyond a teenager’s fingers.

In a further echo of the young Goldberg’s experience, Hewitt recalls that she was undaunted by the work. ‘I wasn’t afraid of it. Bach was such a part of my upbringing and language’ – her father was a cathedral organist – ‘and my teacher had played it a lot, so he could help me with some of the most gnarly bits; he really knew the piece and was a wonderful guide.’

IGOR LEVIT: THE RELUCTANT GOLDBERGER

For Igor Levit, the route to the *Goldbergs* was different again. He recorded the work aged 28 in 2015 as part of an ambitious three-disc set alongside Beethoven’s *Diabelli* Variations and Frederic Rzewski’s *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!* ‘First of all, I refuse to believe that there are pieces where you have to be a certain age to perform them,’ he tells me. ‘If you feel right and you have the ability to pull something off, pull it off! I know of children who have more life experience and more knowledge of suffering than some of my distinguished colleagues who believe that with age comes wisdom. For a long time I didn’t want to play the *Goldbergs* because my most beloved recordings of it were all on the harpsichord, and I thought all the hand-crossing



Harpsichordist Goldberg cheers the insomniac Keyserlingk

and the canons would sound dull on the piano. That’s what I thought in my early twenties – and even in 2014, while I was recording the Partitas because I thought *they* sounded really good on the piano. As I developed as a person I realised this was kind of a stupid thing to say, and made the decision to learn the *Goldbergs* and see how far I could get. When I realised this music could sound right on the piano I got a great desire to record it alongside the *Diabelli* and *People* as a statement about the three most powerful variation sets for the instrument. It was a really uplifting thing to do, knowing that it would be part of that project.’

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Angela Hewitt made her first Goldbergs recording 25 years after learning the piece

TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

That the 30 variations were written for harpsichord is a fact that cannot be ignored when transferring it to the piano. Landowska even thought its unpopularity before her time was down to the fact that it could not be made to work satisfactorily on the piano – though that doesn't seem to have bothered too many people since. Even so, some measure of authenticity with regard to the original circumstance of the piece's composition has to be taken into account. 'I believe this piece cannot be explained only in terms of the piano,' says Lang Lang. 'It has to be looked at in the bigger picture of the instruments of the period, of the harpsichord, the organ – and ornamentation, which plays a pretty major role in this piece, especially in the repeats. I can't just say to myself, "This trill feels nice!" It has to be done for a real reason.' Lang Lang found himself seeking advice from the German keyboardist Andreas Staier (whose own recording of the *Goldbergs* in 2009 is one of those harpsichord favourites of



Igor Levit: 'If you feel right and you have the ability to pull something off, pull it off!'

Levit's). 'He said to me, "I know why you play Beethoven, I know why you play Rachmaninov. You are a player with a lot of heart. But tell me why you are playing Bach. You know the basic rules now, but they are not enough. You have to learn new rules and create something that's somehow authentic, but also make a real passionate sound, not like you're playing an exercise."'

Staier is not the only Baroque sage to have impacted on Lang Lang's thinking about the piece. As early as 2007 he visited and played for Nikolaus Harnoncourt, a meeting which led to them later performing and recording Beethoven and Mozart piano concertos together. Harnoncourt's advice on the *Goldbergs* was typically forthright. 'He didn't want me to play the fast variations,' Lang Lang recalls, 'he just wanted me to play the Aria, Variations 13 and 25 – all the slower passages. I played them in quite a square way, following the down-beat, quite straightforward, and he said, "Why are you playing like this?" I said that I thought this was the way to play Bach, more concentrated in style and sound, not leaping around, not changing colours too much. "Nonsense!" he said, and started singing a passage from near the end of the Aria. "Here you have to think you are the most lonely person in the world, you are all on your own, nobody talks to you. You have to feel this sadness here." So I played it several times, and he would say, "This is not dark enough, this is not sad enough, do it again!" When I played the *Adagio*, Variation 25, he said, "How could you play it like that? Horrible! This is absolutely the wrong way of even thinking about Baroque music. Are you crazy? Where is your heart? It should be the same as when you play Chopin or Brahms or Mozart. You cannot put up a wall between yourself and your emotions!"

'It's like a product of God, but there's a lot of humanity in it – the holy and the worldly come completely together' – Beatrice Rana

This is something I learnt from Harnoncourt and Staier: that Baroque music has lots of rules that are different from Classical rules or Romantic rules, but at the end of the day you can't lock yourself out from the reason for actually playing the piece.'

So how difficult is it to marry the intimidating intellectual demands of this piece with this need for personal expressivity? For Rana, that tension was all part of the fascination. 'One of the reasons I wanted to record the *Goldberg Variations* was because I felt a strong connection with it and had quite a personal view of it. It's a masterpiece, of course, almost like a product of God, which can make it seem almost untouchable. But I feel there is lot of humanity in it, in the fact that the holy and the worldly come completely together. In every variation there is something very human, in the rhythm or the harmonies or how it develops. But at the end, in the repetition of the Aria, you realise that you have experienced something incredibly spiritual. These two aspects coming together make it quite unique.'

SEIZING THE MOMENT

Then there is the question of how spontaneous one should be. Rana feels the right approach is about 'understanding the piece and developing an interpretation, but at the same time leaving room for spontaneity'. She explains, 'We have to be faithful to the composer and the score, but we also have to be faithful to ourselves.' Hewitt remembers her experience at the 1999 recording, when, with everything secured in the can, she went back in after dinner and laid down the whole thing once more in a single complete take. 'It was just so different and so far



Lang Lang performing the Goldberg Variations at the Thomaskirche, Leipzig, in early March 2020: this live recording features on his new set alongside the studio one

above anything I'd ever done in 25 years that I think most of the final recording comes from that one version, taken late at night with my producer and my piano tuner sitting on the floor listening to me. That moment was really special – and really the right time for me.'

To his surprise, Lang Lang had a similar experience, even if it occurred in a different order. 'I did four days in the studio trying to achieve as much as I could with all my ideas about certain different formulae, being precise with the sound and characterising certain variations. There was a lot of experimentation; sometimes I tried maybe two or three different interpretations per variation. I just wanted to get everything in there and see in the end which direction to take in the final mix. Then I got the first edit, and I kind of *liked* it, but I wasn't entirely satisfied. There were things in it that I thought were great, but as a whole it didn't feel unified. So I asked the engineers to send me the recording of a concert performance I'd given in the Thomaskirche in Leipzig earlier that month, an unbelievable experience with Bach's grave nearby. And I *loved* it! This was exactly the unified feel I was thinking of, right there.'

Lang Lang subsequently took the decision to issue the two recordings together. 'The thing was that after the Leipzig performance I'd been working hard on the details I thought would take my interpretation to a higher level. I basically thought I knew the interpretation I was after, but still wanted to try bringing out different voices, or playing a bit more together, or putting the dots on the first beat to vary the articulation.


'I felt my heart was really in the live recording. At the end of the day, you have to be sincere to your interpretations' – Lang Lang

But when I heard the live recording, I felt my heart was really in it. That helped me make decisions about the editing of the studio version; and, of course, there's more detail, more precision and some deeper thoughts in that one. So they are two different recordings, but with similarities – clearly the same person at work. At the end of the day, you have to be sincere to your interpretations – that's what that live recording taught me.'

If interpretations can change and clarify in such a short space of time, then how much can happen over a longer period? Hewitt took the *Goldbergs* back into the studio in 2015, and declares the

result 'more free, with more contrasts, more bounce in the rhythm. I would never think of putting myself into the score, but that's just how it comes out because you're the person playing it, and it's how you


feel at certain times.' 'People change!' agrees Levitt. 'And things change. It matters where you're playing, who you're playing for – you go with the flow. If you are a creative artist it has to be about change, and if it doesn't change, it dies. I'm with Keith Richards when he says, "I'm not getting old, I'm evolving!"'

For Lang Lang, it's about seizing the moment. 'The reason I recorded the *Goldberg Variations* now is because I feel ready. I've found that I have a common understanding of it and feel comfortable with it. When I was studying with Daniel Barenboim, he always said that I have to be sure about doing something, or else it will be an interpretation that won't stand firm. With the *Goldbergs* you have to have confidence in what you're doing. If you don't, you're not ready.' 

► Lang Lang's two recordings of the Goldbergs, on DG, are reviewed on page 56

SINGING THE COLOURS OF THE SOUL





The very first Butterfly,
Rosina Storchio,
focused on emotion
and character, much
like Albanian soprano
Ermonela Jaho herself –
not least on an album
inspired by the turn-of-
the-century singer, finds
Hugo Shirley

There is one operatic image from the last decade that still retains enough power to bring me close to tears whenever I conjure it up in my mind's eye. It's that of the Albanian soprano Ermonela Jaho in a wimple, strikingly lit, centre stage at the Royal Opera House, London. Her eyes are wide open, imploring; her hands are clasped together to project a potent mix of prayer and helplessness. Jaho's central performance in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*, in Richard Jones's unflinching, merciless production, is surely one of the most memorable in Covent Garden's recent history. It's happily preserved on film (indeed, the DVD deservedly won a *Gramophone* Award in 2013) and I would recommend it to anyone wanting to put their emotions through the mincer at the touch of a button.

Every bit as revealing, in a way, is Jaho's curtain call on the film. She comes to the stage with a look somewhere between shattered and relieved. This is not an artist to keep a cool, calculated distance from what she's performing, and she's reliably emotionally poleaxing in a number of other signature roles – Violetta in *La traviata* and Madama Butterfly among them, both of which are captured on DVD.

It's hard not to like her, to be swept along by her curiosity, generosity. It's easy to imagine her as a rewarding onstage colleague

It's a relief, though, to find that none of these grand emotions are accompanied by diva-ish manners when I meet Jaho in a sunny Valencia in October. She's there to record her first solo album with Opera Rara, a programme inspired by the first Butterfly, Rosina Storchio (1872-1945), and we meet in the evening in the miniscule apartment she's staying in for the duration. She welcomes me in like an old friend, and offers me a herbal tea as we settle down to chat in a cramped sitting area.

The wide eyes, broad smile and grand gestures familiar from La Jaho on stage are there, here brought in to enliven our conversation. The soprano's manner is engaging and engaged – 'Exactly!' she agrees, gratifyingly, at several moments – and she has a habit, when her excellent English runs out, to call upon a repertoire of emotive hand gestures or exaggerated intakes of breath. It's very difficult not to like her, to be swept along by her curiosity and generosity. It's easy to imagine that she's a rewarding colleague on stage.

Jaho is now embarking on the third decade of a career whose initial inspiration came when she saw a production of *La traviata* in Tirana as a teenager, which turned her away from early ambitions to be a pop singer. She began her studies in the Albanian capital before catching the eye of Katia Ricciarelli and making the trip across the Adriatic to Italy, garnering prizes and becoming a student of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome in 1994. Her professional debut was as Mimì in Bologna in 2000. Her breakthrough for British audiences came in classic operatic style, when she replaced an ailing Anna Netrebko to sing Violetta at Covent Garden (opposite Jonas Kaufmann and Dmitri Hvorostovsky) in 2008. It's a role, she tells me, she must have sung 300 times now.

Having begun with a repertoire that concentrated on a handful of key roles, she has recently also found herself as something of a figurehead for the dustier corners of *verismo*, not least in a collaboration with Opera Rara that has seen her add sound-

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Jaho in her memorable performance as Suor Angelica in 2011; and as Violetta in *La traviata* in 2019 – both performances at the Royal Opera House, London

only recordings to a discography of filmed theatrical performances. She lent her considerable star power to the label's recording of Leoncavallo's *Zazà* (7/16) – its first significant foray away from the *bel canto* that had traditionally been its focus – and, more recently, to its recording of Puccini's *Le willis* (A/19; the original version of which would become *Le villi*).

When we talk, she's looking forward to donning another wimple to reprise the role of Blanche de la Force in *Dialogues des Carmélites*. It'll be her third production of Poulenc's masterpiece, she tells me. 'Like with *Traviata*, or *Butterfly*, even if you sing something a hundred times, every time – if you are open, if you're up for embracing that kind of experience – you discover something new.' Her agenda was also to include her first staged *Adriana Lecouvreur*, as well as concert performances of Mascagni's *Iris* – both of which fell foul of the Covid crisis.

Happily her most recent project with Opera Rara, a tribute to Storchio, is unaffected. Storchio was the first *Zazà*, the first *Madama Butterfly* and a renowned *Violetta*, who played an important role in the performance history of *La traviata* when, at La Scala, Milan, in 1906, she starred in the first production of the opera to set the action at the time of composition, as Verdi had wanted. One can see the appeal for Jaho, and when she performed a related recital at London's Wigmore Hall earlier this year, *Gramophone* critic Tim Ashley gave it five stars in *The Guardian*, writing of Jaho's 'performances of unsparing veracity and tremendous emotional honesty'.

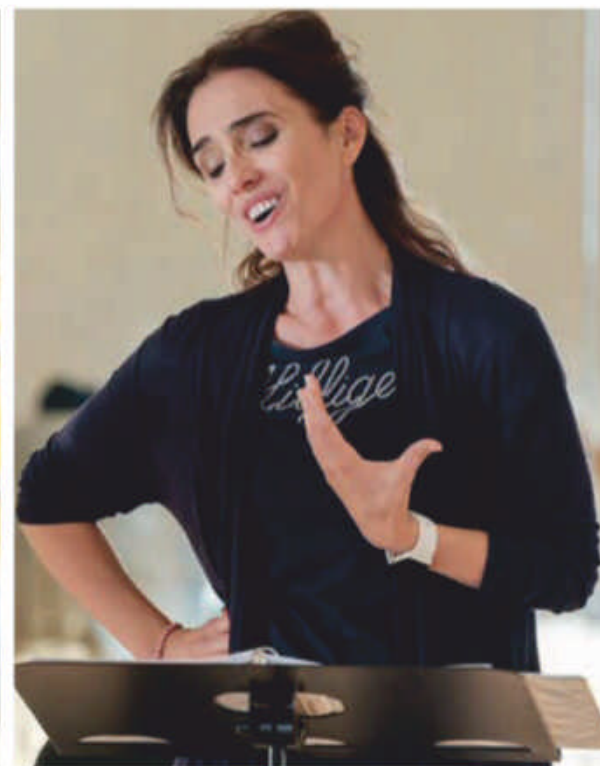
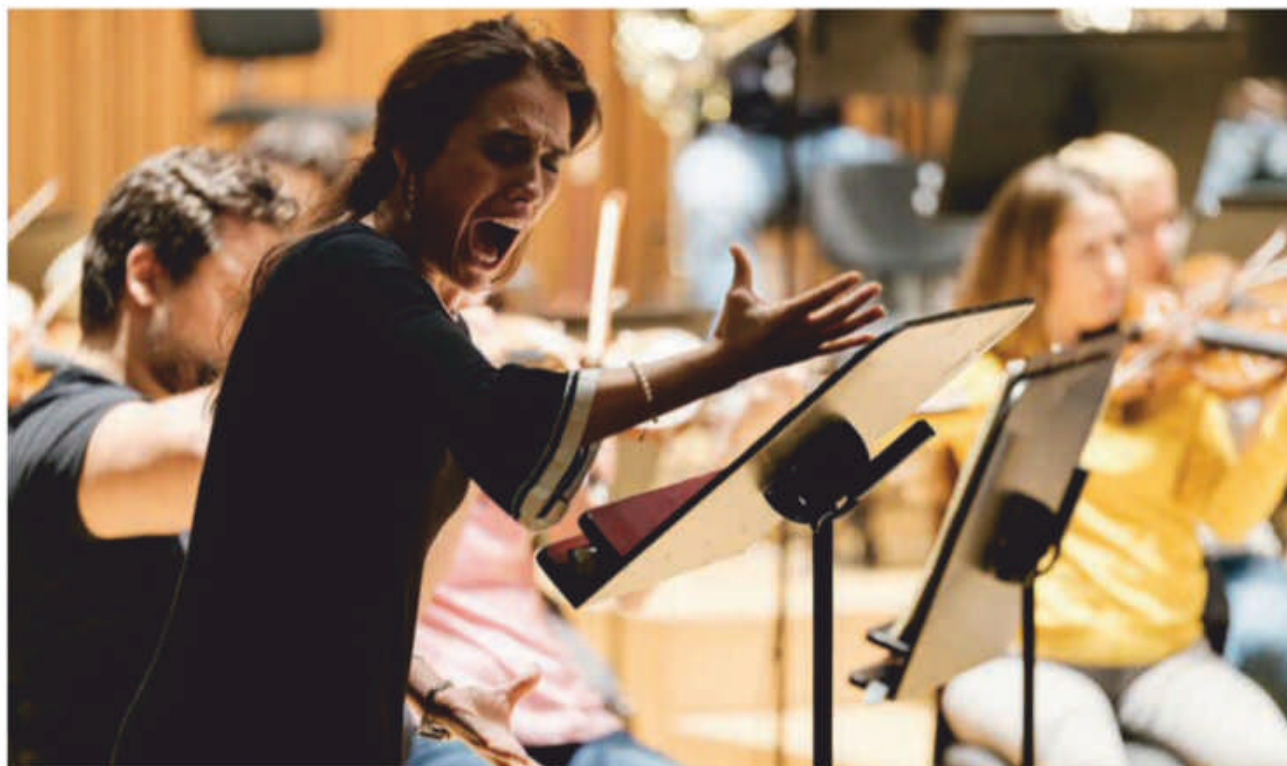
'I'd rather be on stage, like an animal being able to touch every corner of my territory. I want to give and give'

The new album offers a carefully selected mixture of the rare and the familiar, casting a fascinating spotlight on how singers built their repertoire in the first decades of the 20th century, at a time before the orthodoxy of today's vocal categories. But, I suggest at the start of our interview, it must be something of a departure from the norm for a stage animal such as Jaho to find herself in front of a microphone in studio conditions, recording operatic excerpts. 'I'd rather be on stage,' she admits, 'like an animal being able to touch every corner of my territory.'

But, especially after the experiences of recording *Zazà*, she seems to be pretty relaxed, and it didn't take her long to adjust to the process. 'It's something I discovered for myself. I didn't pay attention to the fact that I wasn't on stage, or that I didn't have a public,

I just focused on what the music was telling me. It worked well – and now we have this new project!' The recording process, she admits, can still be hard – especially, one senses, for an artist of Jaho's natural intensity. 'When recording, you have to repeat things for the sound, for the orchestra, for mistakes. You have to repeat and repeat, but even when doing that I want to give and give' – she emphasises the word by stretching it into a long 'geev' before letting her sentence crescendo into a series of big dramatic breaths. 'Of course, when you're on the stage people can see the body, the movements.'

This new project presents further challenges in being a mixed recital. 'You have to switch from Massenet to Verdi to Giordano: the language and the way to express things in each



Verismo drama without the screaming, and with fragility: Jaho at the recording sessions for her new Opera Rara album inspired by Rosina Storchio - Valencia, November 2019

have their own flavour. It's a big, big challenge, but I'm learning so much and I'm so grateful.'

And what about the step across into *verismo*? Here the Storchio model is instructive. As well as being the first Butterfly and Zazà, Storchio sang in the premieres of Leoncavallo's

version of *La bohème*, Mascagni's *Lodoletta* and Giordano's *Siberia*. But accounts suggest she carried performances as much through her acting as through her voice, which was not big.

Indeed, her repertoire stretched back to Mozart, while the few recordings of her that remain include the *bel canto* repertoire that was also an early focus in Jaho's own career.

'Puccini chose her to sing *Butterfly*', the soprano explains, 'to give the character that kind of vulnerability. But you need the skill to know how far you can go, vocally speaking. She jumped from coloratura to *verismo*, but the moment she started singing *Tosca*, she couldn't take it.' This is not a mistake that Jaho

plans to make: 'I've had lots of propositions to sing *Tosca*, and I said no. I know how far I can go!' But she's also had to work against certain preconceptions about what sorts of singers should sing which roles. 'When I started singing *Butterfly*, people kept repeating the stereotype: that you have to have

this big voice to sing *verismo*, otherwise you could lose your voice.'

She admits to growing up with a similar view. 'I had this sort of mentality that if you want to sing *verismo*, you have

to be a dramatic soprano. And I thought I was never going to sing that sort of repertoire, to be honest.' *Madama Butterfly*, though, was always an exception: 'It was the opera that my mother loved so much when I was a child and I wanted to make her happy! And when I opened the full score I saw that Puccini wrote this opera with so many details. Every time *Butterfly* enters, for example, he puts in a lot of colours, *pianissimos*, to give this kind of fragility.'

'Puccini chose Rosina Storchio to sing the role of Madama Butterfly to give the character that kind of vulnerability'



Jaho and the Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana conducted by Andrea Battistoni: at the recording sessions for the new Opera Rara album in Valencia, November 2019

Igor Levit

“Igor Levit is like no other pianist”

Alex Ross, The New Yorker



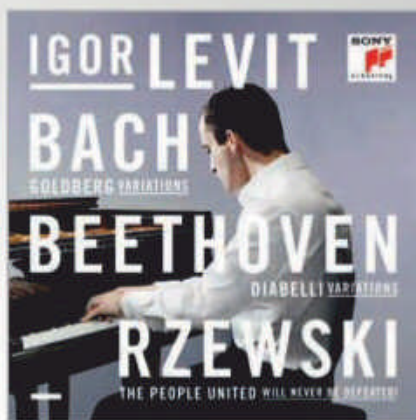
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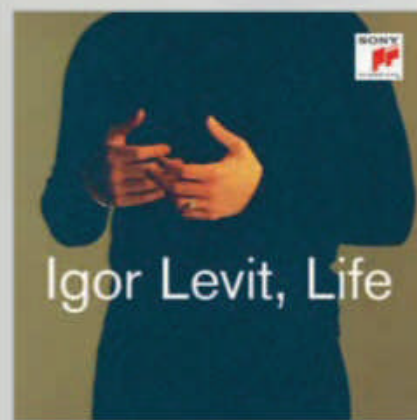


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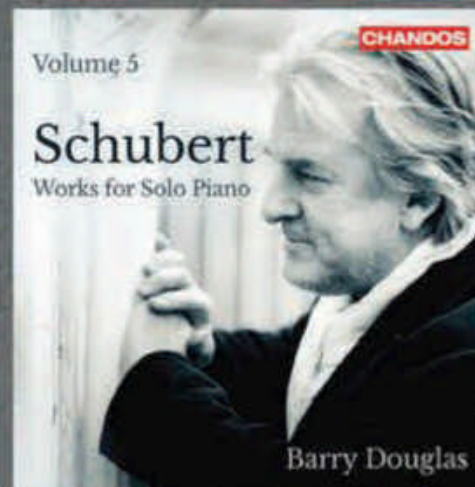


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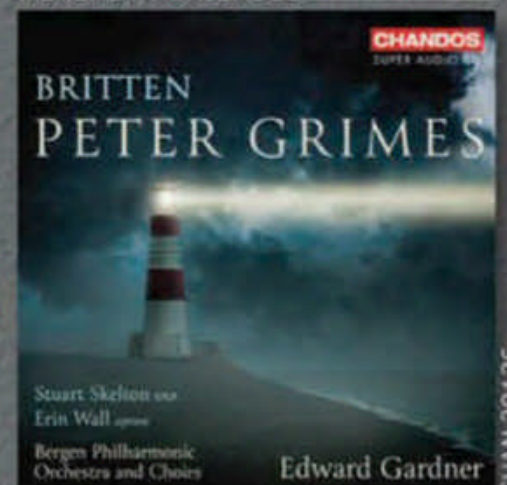
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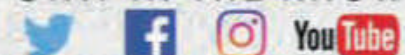
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She goes on to explain that *verismo*, broadly characterised, is a lot more than just the ‘screaming’ that some people seem to see it as. ‘The drama comes more from the south of Italy, with “real” stories – if I can say that. You have to give emotion, but it can be dramatic without the screaming. I give that passion, but with *my* voice. I tried Butterfly and some *verismo* repertoire which I know I can do with my voice (I know my limits), and it worked out. That’s not because I gave something *vocally* exceptional (other singers have the exceptional vocal chords). I found that the key in singing certain operas, certain roles, is the passion, to give emotion through my voice, through its limits.’ Jaho cites Maria Callas as an inspiration, as well as Claudia Muzio (the first Giorgetta in Puccini’s *Il tabarro*), but has never tried to copy anyone: ‘I didn’t want to sound like someone else, or like one of my idols. But I gave to every role I sang the colours of the soul that I was singing and believing.’

It’s easy to see what Jaho means by ‘singing and believing’ when I slip into the recording session in Valencia’s Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia the following afternoon. It’s in the complex’s auditorium, with its 1400-plus seating capacity, replete with striking rib-like supports and located along the spine of Santiago Calatrava’s remarkable fishlike edifice. Jaho seems laidback, using the breaks to chat or discuss a detail or two in the score with a coach. My attempt to slip in quietly is undermined when she waves and beckons me to the stage to return a pen I’d left in the apartment.

That all changes when Andrea Battistoni and the Orquestra de la Comunitat Valenciana strike up with *La Wally*. Then comes the familiar dramatic intensity as she transforms into the character in question. The stage animal’s territory may be restricted, but her energy and engagement certainly aren’t: there’s the wide-eyed intensity, the grandly plaintive or defiant gestures. But there’s an artistic objectivity at play too: in a couple of early takes she makes it clear when something hasn’t quite gone right, checking a point with coach or conductor. The intensity is even greater as we get on to the remarkable final scene from *Lodoletta* (1917), a kaleidoscopic 12 minutes that runs the gamut from Puccinian warmth to operetta-like lightness to Wagnerian *Weltschmerz*.

This scene was a focus of our discussion the previous evening. Jaho describes discovering it as ‘an epiphany – every time I’m in tears! Yes, it’s dramatic, but it’s more than that. You see this little young girl, this little soul. She’s suffering. When you’re young, everything is beautiful, and the drama is big. And the



‘An Evening with Rosina Storchio’: Jaho’s Wigmore Hall debut in February was connected to her latest Opera Rara project

way Mascagni describes that in this opera is really unbelievable. And I thought, “Wow! After 25 years in the business, shame on me that I didn’t know something like this exists!”

Another particular favourite of the repertoire uncovered on the album is Massenet’s *Sapho* – ‘It’s like another *Traviata*, except that it’s in French and no one dies at the end!’ Jaho says with a laugh. And it’s clear as she rifles through the various scores on the coffee table what joy she feels at discovering these works, and at the unexpected side road that her career has now

taken. But she admits it’s also a big responsibility to make as powerful a case for these works as possible. ‘I hope to bring attention to them through the recording.

Music, opera, singing: it’s the language of our souls,’ she goes on. ‘Now you can use the computer and everything to produce the most beautiful and perfect sounds, but I can’t pretend that’s me. And let’s be realistic: sometimes when you’re tired, a vulnerability comes through the voice, but actually makes you *more* real.’

Conveying this quality – call it truth, reality or authenticity – is for Jaho especially important in today’s world, when opera doesn’t necessarily have the automatic claim to an audience’s attention in the same way it did in Storchio’s time. ‘We are so much more naked than before,’ she says. ‘There are musicals, the movies, everything. There are certain movies that can make you feel so emotional, and that’s the competition opera has right now. So you can’t just be superficial. You have to be believable. You can’t fake it on stage. You can never cheat the public.’

‘*Anima rara*’, Ermonela Jaho’s Storchio-inspired album in collaboration with Opera Rara, will be reviewed in the Awards issue

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THE SHORTLIST

Our critics have completed their summer of listening and we've reached the final round of the **2020 Gramophone Classical Music Awards**. Find out which 30 recordings have made it to the final three in each of the 10 categories. The winners will be revealed on September 22 at **gramophone.co.uk** and the special awards will be revealed on October 6



The pianist Bertrand Chamayou (right) acknowledges receiving Recording of the Year 2019 from the contralto Delphine Galou and Gramophone's James Jolly



Dame Emma Kirkby receives the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award and Víkingur Ólafsson performs Rameau after being named Gramophone's 2019 Artist of the Year

CHAMBER

- **Bartók** Piano Quintet **Veress** String Trio
**Vilde Frang; Barnabás Kelemen; Lawrence Power;
Nicolas Altstaedt; Alexander Lonquich** Alpha
- **Beethoven** Violin Sonatas **James Ehnes; Andrew Armstrong** Onyx
- **Dohnányi** Piano Quintets. String Quartet No 2
Marc-André Hamelin; Takács Qt Hyperion



Alpha ⑥
ALPHA458 (10/19)



Onyx ⑥
ONYX4177 (12/19)



Hyperion ⑥
CDA68238 (11/19)

CONCERTO

- **Beethoven** Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 5 **Martin Helmchen;
Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Andrew Manze** Alpha
- **Chopin** Piano Concertos Nos 1 & 2 **Benjamin Grosvenor;
Royal Scottish National Orchestra / Elim Chan** Decca
- **Mozart** Piano Concertos Nos 20 & 21 **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet;
Manchester Camerata / Gábor Takács-Nagy** Chandos



Alpha ⑥
ALPHA555 (12/19)



Decca ⑥
485 0365 (3/20)



Chandos ⑥
CHAN20083 (7/19)

EARLY MUSIC

- **Gesualdo** Madrigali – Libri primo & secondo
Les Arts Florissants / Paul Agnew Harmonia Mundi
- **Peñalosa** Lamentationes **New York Polyphony** BIS
- **'Leonardo da Vinci: La musique secrète'**
Doulce Mémoire / Denis Raisin Dadre Alpha



Harmonia Mundi ⑥
HAF890 5307/8 (12/19)



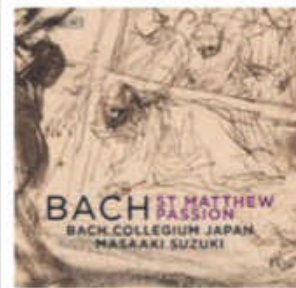
BIS ⑥
BIS2407 (11/19)



Alpha ⑥
ALPHA456 (7/19)

CHORAL

- **Bach** St Matthew Passion
Soloists; Bach Collegium Japan / Masaaki Suzuki BIS
- **Handel** Samson
Soloists; Dunedin Consort / John Butt Linn
- **'An English Coronation'**
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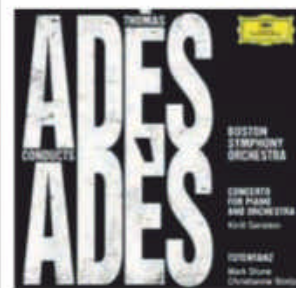
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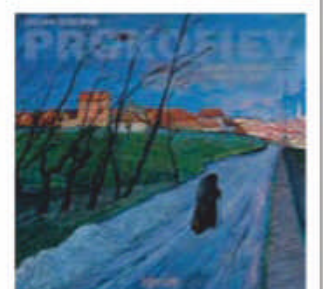
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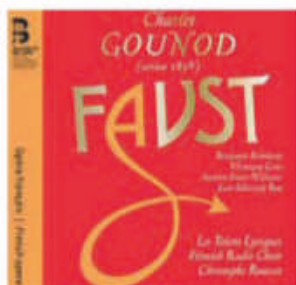
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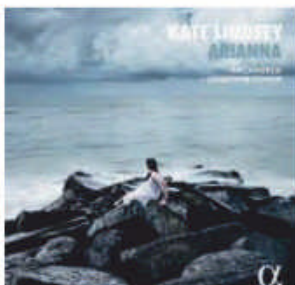
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- **Schubert** Schwanengesang **Brahms** Vier ernste Gesänge Gerald Finley; Julius Drake Hyperion
- **Schumann** Myrthen **Camilla Tilling**; **Christian Gerhaher**; **Gerold Huber** Sony Classical



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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Mike Ashman celebrates a triumphant recording of Britten's Peter Grimes with an outstanding cast and Bergen forces led by Edward Gardner, all presented in superb sound



Britten

Peter Grimes

Stuart Skelton *tenor*.....Peter Grimes
Erin Wall *soprano*.....Ellen Orford
Roderick Williams *baritone*.....Balstrode
Susan Bickley *mezzo-soprano*.....Auntie
Robert Murray *tenor*.....Bob Boles
Neal Davies *bass-baritone*.....Swallow
Catherine Wyn-Rogers *mezzo-soprano*.....Mrs Sedley
Marcus Farnsworth *baritone*.....Ned Keene
James Gilchrist *tenor*.....Rev Horace Adams
Barnaby Rea *bass*.....Hobson
Hanna Husáhr *soprano*.....Niece I
Vibeke Kristensen *soprano*.....Niece II
Edvard Grieg Choir; Royal Northern College of Music Chorus; Choir of Collegium Musicum; Bergen Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra / Edward Gardner

Chandos ② CHSA5250 (138' • DDD)

Includes synopsis and libretto

You could now round up more than a baker's dozen recorded versions officially released of *Grimes* in all formats, visual and audio. That's not bad going for a 1945 opera based on an obscure early 19th-century provincial English poem, set to music by an at-the-time hardly known composer, his opera moreover written and premiered at a time when a world war was just finishing.

Edward Gardner first established his credentials in this work with a thrilling reading of an equally thrilling, David Alden-directed staging at English National Opera. *Grimes*'s dramaturgical conception has always made it especially suitable for ensemble-based performances. It is a most apt choice for Gardner's own Norwegian company in Bergen – like Britten's Aldeburgh itself a sea-going community – and, despite the prominence of Anglophone names and performers here, the local orchestra and the local choruses stamp a distinctive mark on



'Skelton's monologues are neither sentimentalised nor indulged, but outpourings from Grimes's soul'



Special gifts: Edward Gardner conducts Britten

what we hear. A further buzz of excitement is added by the fact that the recording was made (in the city's acoustically famous Grieghallen) following staged concert performances in preparation for a tour.

The strength of both the maestro's and the leading tenor's interpretations here is the difficult one of balance between the 'hurly-burly' (as the libretto has it) of the sea-going and working life of the community and the deliberately formal musical structure of Britten's score. In the past – and especially in live performances – one or the other often has come to dominate to excess. The famous Jon Vickers reading of the title-role – one on disc, one on film, both a closely prepared collaboration with Colin Davis and stage director Elijah Moshinsky – was (and is) knife-edge 'thrilling' (I have to use the word again). And it was also, perhaps, a necessary corrective to the un-violent and poetically classical reading by Peter Pears, the role's creator; it was an essential part of moving the piece forwards in the opera world's repertoire. (We will note, but ultimately not make a judgement from, the rumours that the composer did not enjoy Vickers's performance.)

The net joy of this new recording is that Skelton, now a *Grimes* of considerable experience and range, has found in his vocalisation of the role a well-judged mixture of obsessive professional (sometimes rough) fisherman and troubled, confused and persecuted outsider. He wants to do what he wants and will fight for it, a passion not a neurosis. The internal monologues (if I may call them such) – the so-called one-note aria, 'Now the Great Bear and Pleiades', and the hope for a permanent relationship with Ellen, 'In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home' – are neither sentimentalised nor indulged,



A Grimes for our times: the Australian tenor Stuart Skelton brings considerable experience and range to Britten's troubled fisherman

but obviously essential outpourings from Grimes's soul at particular emotional moments. And, as you might expect, there is plenty of power where it is needed in the Act 1 Storm and the impatience with the new boy Apprentice.

All this is precisely framed by Gardner's conducting and his choice of cast: a cream of what one might hail as 'obvious contemporary British talent' (including some, like Roderick Williams's Balstrode, now on their second *Peter Grimes* characterisation, but not forgetting Canadian/American Erin Wall's Ellen). Here is well worked-in characterful singing but never caricaturing of either age or situation, a good match for Britten's style in this score. Williams's Balstrode manages to convey a great deal of the character and always rather ambivalent support for Grimes with little of the added bluster often delivered, while Wall's Ellen continues what has almost become a tradition of natural-sounding and emotionally well-paced North American interpretations of the role. Elsewhere come particular delights in the scale and tone of the more comic characters – Bickley's Auntie, Wyn-Rogers's Sedley and Neal Davies's Swallow. All the men in the cast make, and are allowed to make, their dramatic points well.

One of Gardner's special gifts is most relevant here: his hearing and presentation of a wide range of dynamics, especially from *mezzo-forte* down. The quieter sections and asides of what is sometimes very much a chamber opera receive their full due here alongside the *tutti* bravado. And his choice of tempos (quite swift in comparison with some predecessors) remains ever conscious of character and situation.

The musical achievement throughout – both instrumental and vocal – seems intensified by the concentration of 'foreign' Norwegian (and other) elements, and is of a high and special quality. This would definitely be a phrase one could also use about Chandos's recording, matchlessly clear, beautifully laid out and with a certain, always logical use of natural sound effects and background chatter where naturally called for. And this hall's acoustics truly are a dream.

With such a large choice of preserved excellence – and no one has ever done a *Grimes* unless they really wanted to and felt the need (no routine here) – a final winner is impossible. You and your speakers and screen should at least be on terms with one of the Britten/Pears and Vickers/Davis versions, and don't forget the strangely neglected Hickox/Langridge and Welser-

Möst/Ventris (EMI DVD – nla) ones either. But let it be said that Gardner, Skelton and Chandos go straight to share the very top of the list, an exciting, committed, necessary and brilliantly recorded version for our times. **G**

Selected comparisons:

Britten, r1958 (10/59^R) (DECC) **D** 475 7713DOR2

C Davis, r1978 (3/79^R) (DECC) 478 5273DMA2

Britten, r1969 (9/08) (DECC) **DVD** 074 3261DH

Hickox (5/96) (CHAN) CHAN9447

C Davis, r1981 (WMV) 0630 16913-2

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	oas only available separately



Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Edward Seckerson hears Ives's symphonies live from Los Angeles:

'Can there be anything more poignant than the church bells fading from our consciousness at the close of the Third Symphony' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 40**



Charlotte Gardner welcomes the latest project from La Serenissima:

'The great news is that "Extra Time" is bristling with the zesty joie de vivre familiar from previous albums' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**

Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 4, Op 58^a.

Coriolan, Op 62. Die Geschöpfe

des Prometheus, Op 43 – Overture

^aKristian Bezuidenhout *fp*

Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Pablo Heras-Casado

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2413 (46' • DDD)



Here we are: instalment three of a series that so far has been one of the finest ornaments of Beethoven's 250th-anniversary celebrations, the collaboration of Kristian Bezuidenhout, Pablo Heras-Casado and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, in the master's works for piano and orchestra. First came the E flat and B flat Concertos in questing, probative performances (3/20). Then, with the Zurich Sing-Akademie and soloists, the *Choral Fantasy* coupled with a Ninth Symphony (9/20) that together, were it not for their health and precision, their blazing colour and finesse of detail, would simply raze the house in their sheer grandeur. Now we have the *sumum* of the classical Viennese piano concerto framed by the overtures to two theatrical works written during the same decade.

And a handsome frame they make. This lean, mean *Coriolan* overture has the sinister grace of a panther about to pounce. The Overture to *The Creatures of Prometheus* belongs, first and foremost, to the Freiburg winds, whose variety of colour and virtuosity make this choicest ear-candy. Heras-Casado's poised but light-footed rhythmic acumen combines with his inerrant instinct for the perfectly sculpted, living, breathing phrase, to create strikingly original interpretations to be savoured with gusto.

As for the main event, Bezuidenhout may have surpassed the most compelling of his solo Mozart set, his Mendelssohn and Mozart concertos with the Freiburgers, his electric Beethoven sonatas with Mullova and even the resplendent *Emperor* Concerto

of this series. Repeated listening has convinced me this is one of the finest, most deeply perceptive and thrilling performances of Beethoven's Fourth Concerto on record. But make no mistake, Bezuidenhout's triumph could only be achieved by the hand-in-glove support and interplay provided by Heras-Casado and the Freiburgers. The vistas of the *Allegro moderato* open on to vast, variegated terrain, traversed with such sensitivity and passion that it seems entirely new.

Whether or not you subscribe to the 19th-century idea, extensively elaborated by Owen Jander in the 20th, that the *Andante* is a musical metaphor for Orpheus at the gates of Hades, it's impossible to escape the sense of dialogue evoked here. Rarely have the strings sounded more formidable or the piano more plaintive. The Rondo is a true *Vivace* as Beethoven intended, bracing in its variety of detail, from the subtlety of the bowing that introduces the movement to the sheer delicacy of the ensemble interaction throughout. It unfolds in a veritable terpsichorean delirium, resulting in an all but overwhelming impression of supernal joy.

All this is delivered in the gloriously dimensional sound that is the norm for Harmonia Mundi these days. If you love Beethoven, delight in the sound of precise and imaginative ensemble and revel in brilliant piano-playing, whatever you do, do not miss this! **Patrick Rucker**

Beethoven • CPE Bach

CPE Bach Symphonies – Wq175 H650; Wq183/4

H666 Beethoven Symphonies – No 1, Op 21;

No 2, Op 36

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / Bernhard Forck *vn*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2420 (79' • DDD)



I approached these performances with some trepidation, as the lovely promise shown in the opening movements of the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin's recent

recording of the *Pastoral* Symphony (4/20) was ultimately thwarted by prosaic phrasing in the Thunderstorm and finale. Happily, there's nothing so disappointing in their alert and finely detailed accounts of the first two symphonies.

As on the previous disc, the orchestra's string section is quite small – just 20 players. Such pared-down numbers are necessary for the members of a conductorless ensemble to maintain visual contact with one another, leader Bernhard Forck explains in the booklet note. The orchestra's seating is unusual, as well, with the upper strings placed stage left (so no antiphonal play of the violins, unfortunately), lower strings at the centre and the winds stage right. When playing en masse, the strings have reasonable power and punch; otherwise they can sound thin – those demisemiquaver scales in the slow introduction to the Second, for instance.

If you're not bothered by the sometimes meagre string sound, there's much to savour here. The outer movements have tremendous energy – so much so that in the opening *Allegro con brio* of the Second, even the silences are electric (at 4'04", say), and note, too, how they make the coda such a satisfying culmination (beginning around 11'22"). They adhere to the metronome marks, but not slavishly. They start the Second's *Larghetto* close to the marked quaver=92, for example, but quickly settle into a more *gemütlich* gait that allows them the breathing-room to make expressive sense of every swell, *sforzando* and ornament. I can't remember ever hearing the Trio of the First Symphony's Menuetto rendered with such delicacy, and the wind-playing is marvellous throughout – listen, say, to the shifting colours at 3'21" in the Second's finale.

The Berliners' *Pastoral* was coupled with Knecht's oddly fascinating *Nature Symphony* (1783). I'm not convinced that the pair of CPE Bach's symphonies offered here is an ideal foil for Beethoven's, although the performances are altogether compelling. Indeed, as with the best of CPE's music,



François-Xavier Roth and Cologne's Gürzenich Orchestra bring vivid character and athleticism to a pair of Schumann symphonies – see review on page 42

nearly every phrase offers some surprise, and the Akademie musicians are responsive to them all.

As usual with recordings from this source, the sound is excellent – atmospheric and well balanced, allowing for a natural sense of transparency. Warmly recommended. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Beethoven • Bruckner

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 4, Op 58^a

Bruckner Symphony No 7

³Emanuel Ax *pf*

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Bernard Haitink

Unitel Editions (DVD 802208; Blu-ray 802304) (116' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • O)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, August 31, 2019



Towards the end of what became his adieu to the podium, Bernard Haitink led the Seventh Symphony of Bruckner

with three orchestras. In itself this concentration was hardly remarkable: having seen it under his baton with seven different ensembles in London during the past 30 years, I think of the Seventh as

Haitink's signature work, the yang to the yin of Mahler's Sixth. He has always conducted the musicians as much as the score, and the precise tints of his final accounts with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic and the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics were accordingly individual. Something about the density of the Berlin sound (preserved both on LP and the Digital Concert Hall) elicited a performance of tremendous grandeur, impressive on its own terms, yet yielding in the final analysis to the more pliant caress of his VPO concerts, the first of them presented complete here.

There is no place in the Seventh for the flinty-eyed vision of the abyss that stamped Haitink's approach to the unfinished Ninth with an increasingly memento mori bleakness. Wholeness in the here and now is instead established from the outset with the patient but subtly inflected first theme's unfolding by the Viennese cellos. Compared to his Concertgebouw recordings, the difference is one of being and becoming. Richard Osborne remarked on the 'deliberately unmoulded' nature of the second recording (Philips, 4/79); no one could reasonably say the same of his final address to the piece, listening to the *Gesangvoll* intensity of the second theme once recapitulated, the additional flesh on the bones of the usually perky third theme

and its marked preparation for the magical first entry of the timpani, *sehr feierlich* (very solemn) indeed.

Haitink's basic tempo for the first movement, more *Allegro* than *moderato*, used to ruffle feathers. Half a century on, coming after diverse Sevenths from Abbado, Harnoncourt and Iván Fischer, it seems ahead of its time, as well as flowing from the uncomplicated *cantabile* line cultivated by the conductor's first mentor, Eduard van Beinum. Meanwhile Haitink himself has travelled upstream; but rather than invoking a sacred-Wagnerian source for this music in the manner of Barenboim or Thielemann, his broader tempos, allied to some striking rhetorical cadences and the Vienna Philharmonic's playing at its most luminous and transparent, establish a Beethovenian model of symphonic innovation taking inspiration from nature and folk culture, one scarcely to be foreseen from the accomplished but placid account of the Fourth Piano Concerto.

This is most strikingly true of the Scherzo. By the clock almost as slow as Celibidache in Munich, the broad impetus and airborne phrasing here revisit the world of the Fourth Symphony (another plank of Haitink's farewell season), only now imbued by the composer with years of accumulated experience in post-Schubertian orchestration to which

decades of brass-led performances, even ones as refined as the conductor's latter-day Chicago reading, have not done full justice.

Just as he takes a new, legato approach to the great C minor trench through the middle of the first movement, bringing round the recapitulation with Mozartian naturalness and economy, so Haitink now places the two themes of the *Adagio* not in contrast but complement (far more convincingly so than in his Bavarian Radio Beethoven Ninth – BR-Klassik, 2/20). Leaving aside a tiny moment of confusion when they intertwine, he imparts a rare sense of complete but provisional satisfaction to the movement's cymbal-capped climax, having a farther horizon in sight.

So does the funeral march of Abbado's valedictory *Eroica* in Lucerne (Accentus, 9/14); but the performances are surprising in equal and opposite ways, Abbado never having previously got to the heart of Beethoven's symphony, whereas, we might have anticipated, Haitink would beat a familiar path to the summit of the Seventh. Wrong again. There is no precedent in his discography – none else on record I know of – for the ascent to and mighty caesura at fig S in the score, yet the moment emerges as the inevitable outcome of the main theme's titanic struggle for stability. Thereafter, instead of nervous intensity, there is only (only!) a steady pulse and clear-sighted purpose that requires no pseudo-mystical slowing down for its consummation but takes the coda as if in a single breath. Like Karajan's farewell Seventh (DG, 5/90) – with the same orchestra, more fallible, more ardent, no less absorbing – it's the work of a lifetime.

Peter Quantrill

Biber · Schmelzer

Biber *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa* – Partia II; Partia VII. *Mystery* (Rosary) Sonatas – No 16, *Passacaglia. Vesperae longiores ac breviores*^a – *Laetatus sum*; *Nisi Dominus* **Schmelzer** *Sacro-profanus concentus musicus* – Sonata VII a 5; Sonata VIII a 5

^aJonathan Sells, ^aLisandro Abadie *basses*

Les Passions de l'Âme / Meret Lüthi *vn*

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi © 19439 76352-2

(62' • DDD • T/t)



There are some standout moments on this album. First there is the superlative singing of Jonathan Sells in Biber's *Nisi Dominus aedificaverit Domum*, sonorous and rounded all the way down to his lowest notes, which seem to emanate from the

earth's core. Wrapped around Sells, the obbligato playing by violinist and director of *Les Passions de l'Âme*, Meret Lüthi, is thrillingly tactile and exploratory: vibrant in shapes and explosive in scratch. Lüthi is fervent that we know the fabric of her sound; she and Sells thus form a marriage that might make one think of Roland Barthes's 1972 essay *The Grain of the Voice* for its presentation of song 'as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings' as well as the visceral grit of bow against gut. But this 'grain' is perhaps taken too far at points in her solo offering. Lüthi's performance of the *Passacaglia* from Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* might do with more instrumental resonance, a coaxing of depth from her Jacobus Stainer violin from 1659, rather than from the acoustical kindness that was perhaps too much at play here.

A second highlight is the utter lusciousness that opens Biber's Partia VII from *Harmonia artificiosa-ariosa*. The timbral magic created by the two violas d'amore played in clairvoyant sync by Lüthi and Sabine Stoffer, a partner in crime of equal agility and invention, is a delight. The partita is, however, inconsistent in this brilliance: the *Gigue* is relentless in opacity – the playing occasionally pushed too far from the robust into the unnecessarily comic – and the *Trezza* is not wholly convincing either in rustic romp or in grace. But the patient are rewarded with sparkling freshness in the performance of the Sonata VII from Schmelzer's *Sacro-profanus concentus musicus*. This is *Les Passions de l'Âme* at their best: colourful and rhetorically well paced (and sometimes wonderfully unpredictable). A simpler way to identify players on individual works would be welcome; all in all, a lovely disc.

Mark Seow

Brahms

Complete Symphonies

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Jordan

Wiener Symphoniker ® ④ WSO21 (169' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Musikverein, Vienna,

September 25, 26, 28 & 29, 2019



If you read Rainer Lepuschitz's extensive booklet note before listening to these performances, as I did, you too may be surprised by what you hear. We're told that Philippe Jordan and the Vienna Symphony give us 'a new way' of hearing Brahms's symphonies, one that avoids the 'rich, thick Brahms sound' by aiming for 'a more

slender, more sensitive sonic image'.

There's discussion of how the symphonies relate to the composer's vocal music ('woodwinds sing as in arias and songs' while 'the strings are combined in motet-like or even madrigalistic polyphony'), as well as the importance of attending closely to Brahms's 'dynamic specifications'. Let's set aside the fact that the fresh-scrubbed and trimmed-down 'new' approach Lepuschitz outlines was put forth by Mackerras and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra more than two decades ago (Telarc, 10/97). More to the point is that, to my ears at least, Jordan's interpretations are actually quite traditional – closer in spirit to Weingartner than to Mackerras and his historically informed successors.

The Vienna Symphony play with confidence and refinement in these live performances, although I wouldn't say their sound is all that slender or 'sensitive' (whatever that means). Orchestral balance is adequate but in no way revelatory (microphone placement appears to place us a dozen rows or so from the stage in the Musikverein's Goldener Saal). There's some lovely woodwind-playing – try the yearning oboe solo at 2'23" in the slow movement of the First, and note, too, how stealthily the clarinet follows on its heels. Indeed, the clarinets seem oddly demure throughout, quite the opposite of aria-like. I'm more taken by the strings, honestly. They're gloriously radiant in the First's finale (listen at 1'05"); and at 7'35" in the *Andante moderato* of the Fourth, Jordan makes good on his claim about motet-like polyphony by giving equal weight to all the string parts, so it's not just the usual melody and richly upholstered accompaniment. He's generally attentive to dynamic markings, too, although that doesn't stop him from appending directives of his own – inserting a disconcerting *subito piano* at 0'31" in the introduction of the First (presumably to make sense of the subsequent *crescendo*, which inexplicably begins at *forte* only to end at another *forte*), and adding an unwritten *mezza voce* at 14'13" in the opening movement of the Second (to breathtaking effect, in this case).

As for the interpretations in a larger sense, they're a bit uneven but largely compelling. I crave more tempestuousness in the *Allegro* of the First (Jordan has the lurching rhythms move so elegantly, there's hardly any sense of breathless urgency). From there, however, his reading gathers strength, with a delightfully bucolic third movement and a finale that conveys breadth and grandeur without skimping on detail. In the *Allegro non troppo* of the Second, again, I need greater volatility (surely the

throbbing rhythmic accompaniment at 3'35" is meant to provide an undercurrent of agitation rather than a cheerful rum-tum-tum). And while the finale ends with a scalding burst of energy, it takes a little too long to come to a boil.

Jordan's performance of the Third is by far the finest of the set. The syncopated, chugging string parts in the opening *Allegro con brio* thrillingly propel the music forward, and yet there's a marvellous sense of ebb and flow. Listen, say, to the unabashed passion at 6'13", the richness of the colours at 7'08" (those sonorous basses and glowing horns), and then the exquisite *dolce* at 8'49". The finale, too, is superb, with an *Allegro* that's not so fast that it hinders the orchestra from really digging in. I love how Jordan broadens the tempo very slightly at 3'51", like a film director slowly panning out to reveal a vast landscape (I only wish the shifting of gears back to speed at 5'06" had been managed a little more subtly, but that's a minor cavil). His way with the Fourth Symphony is nearly as fine. He focuses more on structure than on sweep in the first movement, which may be more to your taste than to mine, but I have no reservations about the rest. The way he underscores the contrasts at the beginning of the slow movement (the pungency of the winds and mellow warmth of the strings) sets the stage for an unusually eventful reading, the third movement dances with hearty humour (notice, too, the playful gusts of scales at 0'53"), and the final chaconne is powerfully sculpted (the violins swooping in at 5'35" feels positively cataclysmic).

So while this isn't a set I can recommend wholeheartedly, there are sufficient insights and moments (entire movements, even) to marvel at that it's well worth hearing, and the Third and Fourth will handsomely repay repeated listening. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Brahms · R & C Schumann

'Darlings of the Muses'

Brahms Symphony No 1, Op 68^a **Montero** Five Improvisations^b **C Schumann** Piano Concerto, Op 7^c **R Schumann** Symphony No 1, 'Spring', Op 38^a

^{bc}**Gabriela Montero** *pf*^{ac}**Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra** / **Alexander Shelley** Analekta ® ② AN2 8877/8 (122' • DDD)

Recorded live in Southam Hall, Canada's National Arts Centre, Ottawa, February 13 & 14, May 1 & 2, 2019; January 15 & 16, 2020



The big news here is the terrific playing of Canada's National Arts Centre Orchestra.

The strings, polished during Pinchas Zukerman's 16-year tenure as music director, sound even more impressive under Alexander Shelley, who has led the orchestra since 2015. Their silky tone shines in the hymnlike passage near the end of the first movement of Schumann's *Spring* Symphony (at 10'00"), for example, and displays solidity as well as depth in the finale of the Brahms. Indeed, Shelley seems to favour a rounded, string-heavy sound in general, so that even the most forceful *fortissimo* is sonorous rather than assertive. I'm quite taken by his emphasis on warmth and lyricism, though it comes at a cost, for while there are occasional moments of excitement – the final minutes of the Schumann, say – these are relatively low-voltage performances.

Rhythm is an issue. Shelley smooths over the syncopations in the *Spring* Symphony, for instance, and his relaxed reading of the dotted figures in the third movement of the Brahms make the music seem more *amoroso* than the marked *grazioso*. As a result, it's the slow movements that are the most satisfying. Listen at 1'54" in the *Andante sostenuto* of the Brahms to how sweetly the violins phrase their yearning melody – and the exquisite liquid quality of the subsequent oboe solo deserves special mention.

This two-disc set is apparently the first instalment in a series focusing on the 'love triangle' involving Brahms and Robert and Clara Schumann. Gabriela Montero plays Clara's youthful Piano Concerto with an expressive intensity that's almost Brahmsian, and a far cry from the Mendelssohnian elegance Howard Shelley (the conductor's father) brings to the score (Hyperion, 5/19). The finale feels a bit overlong here; Shelley *père's* fleetness mitigates this feeling of protraction. That said, there's an improvisatory quality to Montero's playing that highlights the music's florid inventiveness. She brings a touching sense of confidentiality to the central Romanze, gracefully aided by principal cellist Rachel Mercer.

The programme is filled out with five brief improvisations Montero says were inspired by her experiences playing Clara's music. Judging these miniatures not as compositions but as musical thoughts captured on the fly required a conscious change in attitude on my part (and served as a stark reminder of how far removed our current notion of classical music is from the extemporaneous). This is a pleasurable task, mind you, especially as Montero's imagination is so rich. I'm certain I'd never be able to tie her improvisations back to Clara if I encountered them outside this

context – I hear nearly as much Rachmaninov as either Schumann or Brahms, honestly – yet I'm just as certain that that doesn't matter one bit.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Dvořák

Cello Concerto, Op 104 B191^a. *Allegro moderato*, Op 75 B150 No 1^b. *Lasst mich allein*, Op 82 B157 No 1^b. *Silent Woods*, Op 68 B133 No 5^b. *Songs my mother taught me*, Op 55 B104 No 4^b. *Symphony No 9, 'From the New World'*, Op 95 B178 – *Largo* (*Goin' Home*)^b

Kian Soltani *vc*^b**Cellists of the ^aStaatskapelle Berlin** / **^aDaniel Barenboim**

DG ® 483 6090GH (62' • DDD)

^aRecorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, October 2018



Listening to Kian Soltani performing Dvořák's Cello Concerto with Daniel

Barenboim and the Staatskapelle Berlin, the slightly old-fashioned word that kept finding its way into my notes was 'nobility'. To those who've been following Barenboim's Berlin Elgar recordings, that probably won't come as too much of a surprise; and it almost goes without saying that the orchestral playing on this recording is silken, translucent and lit with an inner glow.

Barenboim moves broadly and with deliberation, using his orchestra's full operatic palette: by the end of the slow movement we could almost be in Siegfried's forest. Soltani fills gracefully shaped phrases with eloquent, butterscotch-tinted cello sound. He crafts a lucid, clearly defined and distinctly classical reading, not without humour (the opening theme of the finale almost seems to skip).

But nobility also implies restraint; we're a long way here from the body-and-soul emotional commitment of (say) Karajan and Rostropovich. Both Barenboim and Soltani husband their reserves of expression, though when they do cut loose – for instance, when the second subject returns in majesty near the end of the first movement – they go straight for the heart. A more serious reservation concerns the woodwind-playing. It's ravishing, of course, but I never quite felt that Barenboim lets his players off the leash to create the moments of chamber-music intimacy – of tender, playful conversation with the soloist – that are such an enchanting feature of this concerto.

Still, that might be a price worth paying for the overall grandeur, the tonal beauty

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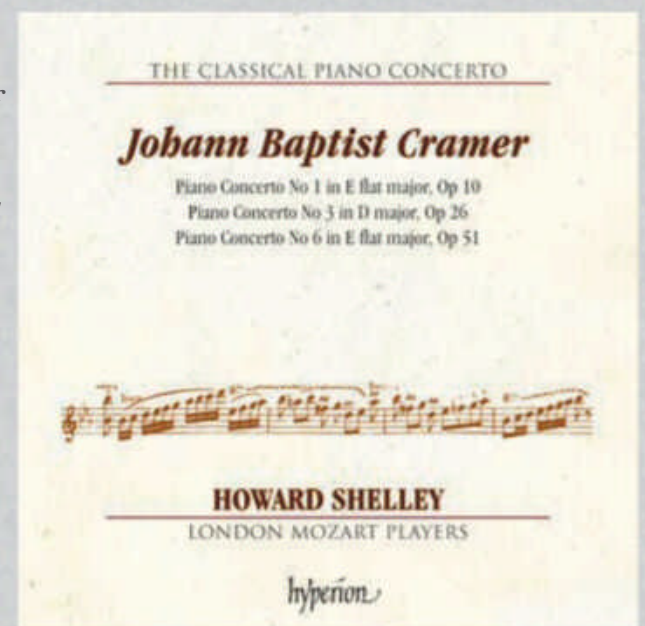


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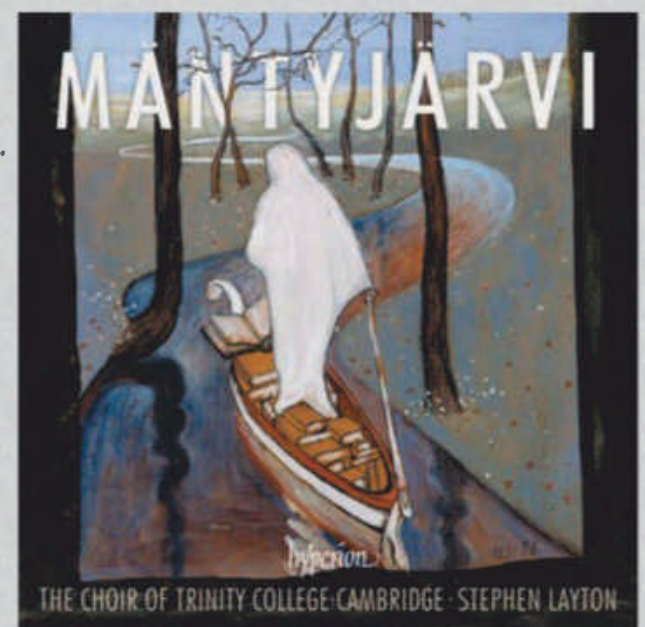


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and – again – nobility of this performance. Soltani and the cellos of the Staatskapelle do, for what it's worth, find some real intimacy in the five gorgeously played encores for cello ensemble that close the disc; and if this is your sort of thing, you won't hear it done better.

Richard Bratby

Falla • Granados

Falla *Noches en los jardines de España*^a.

El sombrero de tres picos^b.

La vida breve – Interlude and Dance

Granados *Goyescas* – Intermezzo

^bAlejandra Gómez Ordaz *mez*^a Jorge Federico

Osorio *pf* The Orchestra of the Americas /

Carlos Miguel Prieto

Linn © CKD625 (75' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Sala Nezahualcóyotl, Mexico City, July 15-17, 2019



The Orchestra of the Americas and Carlos Miguel Prieto have opted

for the familiar Falla pairing of *El sombrero de tres picos* and *Noches en los jardines de España* for their second disc for Linn, recorded live in Mexico during performances that roughly coincided with the centenary of *Sombrero*'s premiere in July 1919. Prieto's interpretation of the ballet is for the most part extremely fine, if occasionally low-key. Once past the trumpets, drums and shouts of 'Olé' in the Introduction, he takes his time with it, underscoring the sensuousness of Falla's orchestration, and carefully controlling the gathering tensions before releasing them in a heady, exultant account of the final Jota.

The orchestra itself is effectively a training ground for musicians aged between 18 and 30, which Prieto, music director since 2011, has forged into a superb ensemble. There's some beautifully detailed playing, with ravishing strings in the Seguidillas and majestic flamenco turns at the start of the Miller's Farruca, while the brass are gleamingly assertive throughout. Prieto permits the hypocritical Corregidor a certain staid elegance in his minuets, avoiding the usual caricature. The downside here, though, is that the comic scenes could do with more bite, while elsewhere everything feels a bit too considered, particularly when compared with the sheer exhilaration and panache of Pablo Heras-Casado's recent version for Harmonia Mundi.

Prieto's careful way with Falla is arguably better suited to *Noches en los jardines de España*, where the orchestral playing is

finely textured and the debts to Debussy, Ravel and early Stravinsky are all acknowledged without losing sight of Falla's often astonishing originality. Jorge Federico Osorio, playing with unusual weight of tone, steers a course somewhere between the poetry of Alicia de Larrocha (with the LPO and Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos) and the greater dramatic fire of Javier Perianes (with the BBC SO and Josep Pons), though on a disc that is otherwise scrupulously engineered and balanced, the piano sounds very far forwards and the orchestra some way back.

The first of the two fillers is the familiar extract from *La vida breve*: the Dance is a bit genteel, though the preceding Interlude is grandly post-Romantic and passionate. The second is the *Goyescas* Intermezzo, beautifully done and discreetly placed just before *Noches* as a quiet reminder that Granados's terrible death, days before the Falla's premiere, would have been fresh in the minds of the work's first audience.

Tim Ashley

El sombrero de tres picos – selected comparison:

Mahler CO, Heras-Casado

(11/19) (HARM) HMM90 2271

Noches en los jardines de España – selected comparisons:

Larrocha, LPO, Frühbeck de Burgos

(6/84^R) (DECC) 478 6966; (ELOQ) ELQ480 7844

Perianes, BBC SO, Pons (1/12) (HARM) HMC90 2099

Finzi • Vaughan Williams

Finzi *Clarinet Concerto, Op 31*^a

Vaughan Williams *Symphony No 5*

Philharmonia Orchestra / Michael Collins ^a*cl*

BIS © BIS2367 (69' • DDD/DSD)



Michael Collins's second recording of Finzi's Clarinet Concerto (Chandos,

1/13), where he also directed the BBC Symphony Orchestra, came out top in my *Gramophone* Collection four years ago (6/16), 'a rhapsodic, poetic interpretation', I concluded. His earlier recording, with the City of London Sinfonia under Richard Hickox (Virgin, 8/88), is still unavailable but Collins has just recorded the concerto for a third time. With his Chandos account still sounding stunning, it rather prompts the question: why?

I guess you could respond: why not? This time, the recording is for BIS (Collins's label debut) and he conducts the Philharmonia, the orchestra with which he played principal clarinet for much of his early career in the 1980s. Collins's ripe tone is very much undiminished and he

shapes Finzi's winding melodies as affectionately as ever. The BIS recording has more heft to it than its Chandos counterpart; recorded last July at the Watford Colosseum, the strings are in closer focus, revealing slightly more detail. As an interpretation, Collins's view hasn't altered much. He is slightly more relaxed in the outer movements here, although the *Allegro vigoroso* strings very much live up to their billing in the score.

The one caveat I offered about Collins's Chandos recording was that the slow pace of the *Adagio* (12'27") 'may not suit all tastes'. Here he is closer to Finzi's suggested metronome marking of crotchet=50, even allowing for the composer's *ma senza rigore* (11'56"). There's a feeling of pastoral ease without ever getting stuck in a 'cow staring over the fence' rut, encouraging such impassioned string-playing that the movement's emotional climax registers strongly.

Finzi's really is a very fine clarinet concerto. Stephen Johnson's booklet note describes how the composer 'seems to have penetrated to the soul of the instrument' and as long as Collins performs it, the work will find new admirers. Should you pick this newcomer above his Chandos recording? That could depend on your response to the slow-movement tempo (try and sample both discs), but also on the coupling. For Chandos it was joined by clarinet concertos by Stanford and Arnold, whereas for BIS, Collins makes his debut recording as a symphonic conductor, pairing the Finzi with another pastoral creation premiered six years earlier, Vaughan Williams's Fifth Symphony.

Collins has a natural feel for the work's structure and draws glowing playing from the Philharmonia. The Scherzo has lovely woodwind accents and the cor anglais solo that opens the Romanza (presumably Jill Crowther but there is no list of players in the booklet) is suitably gold-spun. The last new recording of the Fifth I heard was Andrew Manze's excellent account with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Manze takes tauter control over the outer movements – the drive in the first movement is thrilling – but Collins builds up a good head of steam in the Passacaglia, the Philharmonia brass in blazing form. I'd be keen to hear more from Collins the conductor, as long as there are no plans to abandon the clarinet just yet, please.

Mark Pullinger

Finzi – selected comparisons:

King, Philh Orch, Francis (11/80^R) (HYPE) CDH55001

Collins, BBC SO (1/13) (CHAN) CHAN10739

Vaughan Williams – selected comparison:

RLPO, Manze (4/18) (ONYX) ONYX4184

Ives

Complete Symphonies

Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra /

Gustavo Dudamel

DG ④ ② 483 9505 (125' • DDD)

Recorded live at Walt Disney Concert Hall,

Los Angeles, February 21-29, 2020



The evolution of American music is chronicled right here in this quartet of

symphonies. And when heard – as I did here – in a single sitting, it's as if Ives is transitioning from the Old World to the New before our very ears. The opening paragraph of the First Symphony might be a fragment from a hitherto unknown Schubert symphony, until it quickly becomes apparent that the logic is somewhat skewed and this composer has ideas – and processes – of his own to explore.

There's a moment towards the close of what might at a stretch be called the development of this first movement – a moment close to mystical – where the language is still familiar but the accent and sensibilities are foreign, if not yet 'American'. Gustavo Dudamel identifies this moment precisely and in the beefy coda that follows his Los Angeles Philharmonic almost give the game away. Their panache is decidedly not central European. The cor anglais solo of the slow movement could be a close cousin of its counterpart in Dvořák's *New World* Symphony but the gorgeous string embellishments (exquisitely played) which eventually elaborate it betray an individual, not to say rebellious talent. And who but a rebellious talent would deploy marching-band percussion – but only for the coda of the last movement?

I do like Dudamel's performance of the Second Symphony. From the moment 'Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean' raises her head above the rich hymnody of the first movement, he and his Angelinos are eager to communicate that Ives has all but arrived, and that while the old central European influences still enchant him, the harmonic and rhythmic displacements are piling in with impunity. Dudamel makes much of the out-of-sync side drum (suggestion of a well-meaning amateur) in the second movement and the vividly pointed contrapuntal square-dancing of the finale is beautifully contrasted with the utter gorgeousness of the second subject idea, where solo horn and violins and later solo cello and flute beguile us with the simplest two-part counterpoint.

Occasionally Dudamel misses a trick – like the wildly dissonant 'wrong note' trumpets who essentially blow a raspberry at the trombones' vulgar rendition of 'Columbia'. They are barely audible in the concluding melee, where they should leap out at us like a deliberate mistake. Mind you, Dudamel does go off at one hell of a lick in the coda, impatient to arrive at the Pythonesque pay-off, where the proverbial 'boot' squashes everything flat with the mother of all discords. Needless to say, he does a Bernstein here, lengthening the final note from a quaver to an extended crotchet.

Ives is now well and truly Ives. The super-homespun Third Symphony is not writ large (a small chamber orchestra and short duration) but is ripe with Ivesian nostalgia – childhood recollections refracted through magically oblique harmonies and metres. It is the essence of Ives but mellow and reflective of tone, and Dudamel – who clearly knows where Ives is coming from – embraces this 'new normal' with much affection. Can there be anything simpler or more poignant than the church bells fading from our consciousness at the close?

The Fourth Symphony is a masterpiece – arguably the most important of all American symphonies, certainly the most individual. It is deeply philosophical, addressing the whys and wherefores of our existence from the perspective of this most 'uncommon man', and when the chorus chant 'Watchman, tell us of the night' at the outset, in what is probably the shortest but most prophetic movement in symphonic literature, we do not anticipate easy answers.

If I have any criticism of this impressive – and forensically lucid – Dudamel account it pertains to the 'Comedy of Life' second movement. He certainly lays bare this ultimate Ivesian collage (the orchestral piano part – four hands – especially well revealed), relishing the multiple collisions of Americana as we drift in and out of chaos rocking gently in a kind of semi-consciousness. But I wanted him to convey more enjoyment of the anarchy as this or that popular ditty jostles to make itself heard. 'Comedy' is the operative word here.

It has been said that the 'conservative' fugue of the third movement is in some ways the most revolutionary movement of all. It sounds so sonorous and organ-like (organ actually underpinning) here – played with relish. But there's a moment I always wait for towards the close, where a solo clarinet contrives its own wonky counterpoint to the strings. So moving, so Ives.

Sonically speaking, Dudamel and his DG engineers render the finale impressively.

How to describe this cosmic processional with its subterranean out-of-kilter percussion group striving towards some level of synchronicity and wholeness? It is quite literally out of this world – and it was written just after Mahler left us. No wonder Ives was on his radar.

Edward Seckerson

Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 19, K459; No 27, K595.

Rondo, K386

Francesco Piemontesi *pf*

Scottish Chamber Orchestra / Andrew Manze

Linn ④ CKD622 (67' • DDD)



Francesco Piemontesi, Andrew Manze and the SCO return to the Usher Hall and

to Mozart for a second disc in their series placing the ubiquitous (in this case the last piano concerto, K595 from the composer's final year) with the slightly more rarely performed (K459 from the end of 1784). Once again there is no shortage of the appropriate intimacy and interplay between instrumental groups, although it feels as if the microphones have moved closer a touch in the earlier work to highlight the conversation between piano and chattering woodwinds.

Tempos are all judiciously chosen but may in places feel a little careful. The finale of K595 comes in over half a minute behind Maria João Pires (with Abbado in 2011), while that of K459 is 40 seconds slower than Clara Haskil in 1955. What's lost in impishness, though, is gained in clarity, not only of line but also of expression, and in the kick that the music suddenly receives as Mozart's flippant *opera buffa* sound world is suddenly pushed aside by the headbanging counterpoint that strays in from his studies of Bach.

Piemontesi has no hesitation in ornamenting liberally – 'as if it were all too easy for him', as I wrote of Vol 1 (9/17). Is it a little too much? Perhaps only in that magical moment in the central *Larghetto* of K595, where the piano's statement of the theme, doubled only by first violins and flute, 'floats, serene and unearthly, into the final tutti' (HC Robbins Landon). Less, here, is certainly more.

In places it may seem a little cool. Just as you think so, though, some harmonic turn, some fingery challenge suddenly inspires Piemontesi and the inspiration in a flash becomes molten, the involvement absolute. He truly comes into his own in the cadenzas (*echt* Mozart in both concertos).



High-voltage interpretations: John Wilson directs the Sinfonia of London in spectacularly recorded accounts of Respighi's Roman Trilogy

Don't discard Pires (in K595) or Clara Haskil (in both concertos), among many other immovable classic recordings; but do give Piemontesi a listen. **David Threasher**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Haskil, BPO, Bavarian St Orch, Fricsay

(3/58^R, 5/61^R, 12/97) (DG) 449 722-2GOR

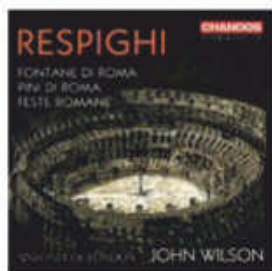
K595 – selected comparison:

Pires, Orch Mozart, Abbado (1/13) (DG) 479 0075GH

Respighi

Feste Romane. Fontane di Roma. Pini di Roma
Sinfonia of London / John Wilson

Chandos ⑤ CHSA5261 (60' • DDD/DSD)



John Wilson and his Sinfonia of London have opted for Respighi's Roman

Trilogy for their third album and, as we have come to expect from these forces, the results are nothing if not gripping. This is a high-voltage interpretation, virtuosically played and strong on detail and drama, in which Wilson digs deep into the complexities both of Respighi's at times eclectic imagination and his extraordinary powers of orchestration.

Feste Romane, placed first and arguably the disc's high point, sounds more overtly

modernist and dissonant than it sometimes does, bringing us up sharp in the 'Circenses' opening section, where Wilson unleashes such a cataclysm that the ricocheting brass fanfares, excruciating harmonies and high decibel count all leave you feeling vaguely pulverised. Respighi's well-known debt to Stravinsky is very much apparent in both the *Noces*-like bells that greet the arriving pilgrims in 'Il giubileo' and the garish thematic juxtapositions of the final 'La Befana', which takes the Shrovetide music from *Petrushka* as its model. The third movement is wonderfully poised, and the central scherzo-cum-waltz has strong echoes of *Jeux*, before the mandolin serenade brings it to its close.

There's a comparable sense of excitement elsewhere. Wilson's way with Respighi's depiction of the Triton fountain is all clarity and brilliance, and really gives a sense of the play of almost blinding light on water, while the Trevi episode has irresistible momentum and élan. The outer movements of *Fontane*, however, are a fraction cool, though the playing is consistently lovely, with the high violin harmonics at the start shaded down to the merest hint of sound, and the woodwind solos all beautifully focused and shaped.

The Gianicolo section of *Pini* has a similar cool beauty, which contrasts perhaps more effectively here with the

awe of the Catacombs scene and the almost abrasive energy of the children's games at the start, where Wilson carefully stresses the Stravinskian dissonances that gave the work's first audiences such trouble. The final tramp down the Appian Way, meanwhile, builds to another shattering climax that leaves you faintly shell-shocked.

The competition in this repertoire is, of course, stiff, not least from Riccardo Muti and the Philadelphia Orchestra (EMI, 11/85) and Antonio Pappano and the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (11/07). And for those who prefer a more poetic approach to Respighi, then Karajan's ravishing *Fontane* and *Pini* with the Berlin Philharmonic (11/78 – he never recorded *Feste*) still have much to recommend them. But Wilson and his orchestra more than hold their own against their rivals, and perhaps just have the edge over them thanks to Chandos's superbly engineered recording, which is state-of-the-art, and absolutely stunning. **Tim Ashley**

Rodrigo

Soleriana. Tres Viejos Aires de danza. Dos Miniaturas andaluzas. Zarabanda lejana y villancico

Orquesta de la Comunidad Valenciana Palau de les Arts Reina Sofía / Joan Enric Lluna
IBS Classical ⑤ IBS82020 (53' • DDD)



This recording, made in conjunction with a concert commemorating

the 20th anniversary of the composer's death in April 2019, provides a welcome opportunity to hear some of Rodrigo's lesser-known orchestral works. The earliest of the pieces is *Zarabanda lejana* ('Distant Saraband'), a wistful composition originally written for guitar in 1926 when Rodrigo was studying in Paris. In 1930 he scored the work for strings and added the *Villancico*, a festive and dancelike piece with a surprisingly variegated use of timbre for its short duration. Also scored for strings, the *Dos Miniaturas andaluzas* date from 1929 but remained unperformed for decades until finally receiving a premiere in 1999. Although little more than five minutes in duration, the Andalusian flavour of the work's melodic and rhythmic inspiration is a delight and it's a work that deserves to be far more widely known.

The *Tres Viejos Aires de danza*, scored in 1929 for chamber orchestra, have a distinctly neoclassical feel, although, as the informative booklet note explains, Rodrigo preferred the term 'neocasticismo'. Also paying tribute to the past is *Soleriana* of 1953, an attractive suite of eight movements for chamber orchestra based on keyboard sonatas by Antonio Soler (1729-83), of which five movements are included here. Although the score allows for the work to be performed in partial form, it's a pity that the opportunity wasn't taken to record the remaining three movements. These are included on the Naxos recording by Maximiano Valdés, which remains unique in featuring the full suite. Having said that, Joan Enric Lluna's performances on the new disc are wonderfully vibrant and idiomatic, and the recording, made in the Palau de les Arts in Valencia, allows everything to be heard with warmth and immediacy.

Christian Hoskins

Soleriana, Zarabanda lejana y villancico –

selected comparison:

Asturias SO, Valdés (11/02) (NAXO) 8 555844

Rodrigo • Garcia • Ponce

Garcia China Sings! **Ponce** Concierto del sur

Rodrigo Concierto de Aranjuez

Junhong Kuang gtr **Czech Chamber Philharmonic**

Orchestra Pardubice / Darrell Ang

Naxos © 8 579053 (58' • DDD)



A new recording of Rodrigo's *Concierto de Aranjuez* is always welcome.

Unencumbered by profundity yet full of strong feeling, impeccably crafted yet eschewing innovation, it rightly remains one of the most popular concertos ever written. Likewise, any guitarist of talent has merely to 'play the notes as written' and Rodrigo will do the rest, such is the work's irresistible beauty and simplicity. Nevertheless, players will often lean towards either neoclassical coolness or flamenco-inflected passion.

The brilliant young guitarist Junhong Kuang is somewhat in the former camp and brings the excellent Czech Chamber Philharmonic Orchestra Pardubice and conductor Darrell Ang along with him. This is an account of great clarity, precision and – perhaps unintended but enjoyable all the same – Stravinskian objectivity and irony. A contrasting view looms on the horizon, with Thibaut Garcia's recording out soon. In the meantime, I probably won't forsake my Pepe Romero just yet.

Couplings also separate a new recording of the *Concierto de Aranjuez* from its predecessors. In this case, we're fortunate to have an extremely fine account – sunny, relaxed, exciting – of Ponce's *Concierto del sur*, as well as the guitarist/composer Gerald Garcia's *China Sings!*, which was dedicated to the then 12-year-old Junhong Kuang. Garcia's 'rhapsody' uses two Chinese popular tunes – 'Dark sky' and 'Silver clouds chasing the moon' – as its primary material, while the guitar's flowing tremolos recall the sound of the pipa. It's a terrific work, to which soloist, orchestra and conductor do full justice. Indeed, excellent though Junhong Kuang's Rodrigo is, *China Sings!* may be the reason you purchase this recording. **William Yeoman**

Rouse

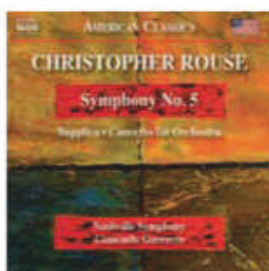
Symphony No 5. Concerto

for Orchestra. Supplica

Nashville Symphony Orchestra /

Giancarlo Guerrero

Naxos American Classics © 8 559852 (72' • DDD)



The death at the age of 70 earlier this year of Christopher Rouse also brought a premature close to a symphonic cycle with few current equals in terms of emotional

intensity and panache. While the Fifth Symphony (2015) predicated the latter quality, this implies no lack of substance in a piece where allusion to the Beethoven archetype is by no means merely anecdotal. Unfolding continuously, the tensile sonata-allegro is followed by a slow movement of understated poise, its unexpected return cutting across the lithe Scherzo to become an extended introduction to a finale whose compactness serves to accentuate its cumulative energy and surging affirmation.

A finely proportioned and readily communicative work, such as makes an ideal point of entry into Rouse's symphonies, and one which is appropriately complemented by the Concerto for Orchestra (2008). Taking its cue (and why not?) from Bartók's trailblazing example, this is also a continuous span but here the underlying trajectory is of two parts. The five sections of the first alternate incisiveness and rumination, all the while highlighting different components of the orchestra, whereas the second part juxtaposes these in an extended sequence accruing momentum on its way to a peroration that feels the more exhilarating for its collective unity.

Contrast is provided by *Supplica* (2013), an expressive yet never discursive rhapsody that, as Giancarlo Guerrero renders it, seems less of a counterpart to the eloquent *Rapture*, as is ably conveyed by Carlos Kalmar, than an 'informal continuation' (the composer's words) of the Fourth Symphony – hitherto Rouse's most unsettling and equivocal work. An orchestra with a notable past (and hopefully future), the Nashville Symphony rises admirably to these pieces' not inconsiderable challenges. Sound has no lack of clarity or definition, and the booklet note rightly places emphasis on Rouse's own pithy observations. All in all, an impressive release. **Richard Whitehouse**

Supplica – comparative version:

Oregon SO, Kalmar (9/18) (PENT) PTC5186 727

Schumann

Symphonies – No 1, 'Spring', Op 38^a;

No 4 (original version)^b

Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne /

François-Xavier Roth

Myrios © MYR028 (55' • DDD/DXD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Cologne,

^bDecember 16-18, 2018; ^aJune 18-18, 2019



Schumann himself conducted the Gürzenich Orchestra of Cologne, and the

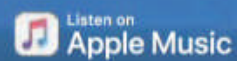


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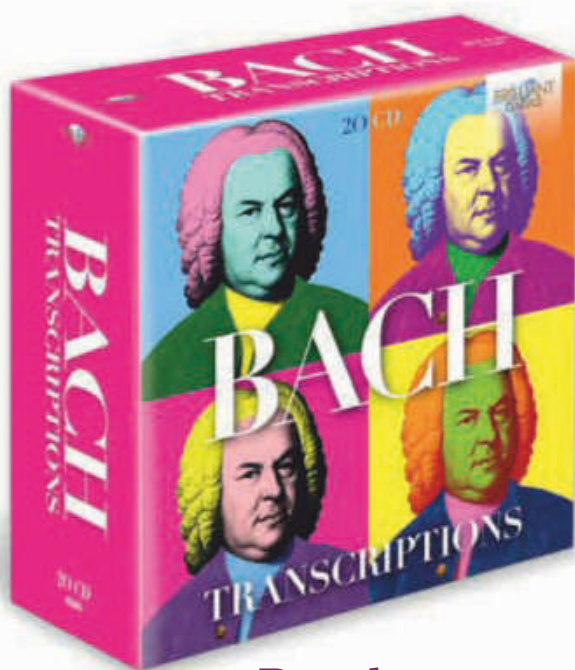


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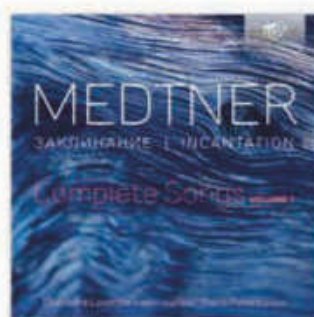


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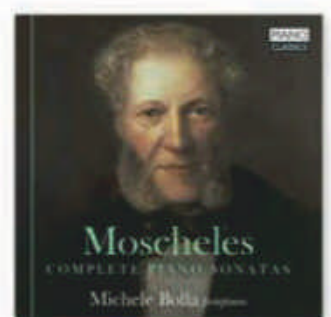
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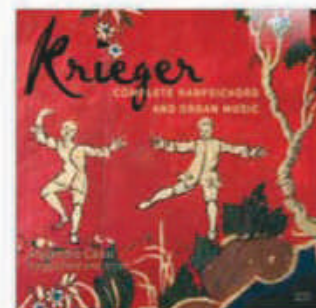
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CD booklet makes a case for the ensemble's continuing connection with his music via conductors from Ferdinand Hiller in the mid-19th century down to the city's current General Music Director, François-Xavier Roth. Indeed, Roth made Schumann the focus of the orchestra's 2018-19 season, two performances from which form his recorded debut not only in the composer's music but also with the Myrios label.

He's far from the first to do so, but Roth makes the once-heretical case, through judicious observance of the score and an acute ear for sonority, that Schumann knew what he was doing. Timpani in the *Spring*'s slow introduction roll like distant thunder, a bass trombone eructates imperiously, while pinpoint string articulation grants the music the clarity it requires and (still) so seldom receives. Considering these recordings are taken from live performances, the precision is noteworthy. Schumann didn't make it easy either for his players or for his conductors.

The Fourth Symphony is presented in its groundbreaking, sinewy 1841 version, rather than the more common, beefier, bulkier beast it was to become following its revision a decade later. It's become a popular alternative, and makes sense when coupled as here with the First Symphony from earlier in the same year; perhaps Roth and his Rhinelanders intend to offer the later version on a subsequent disc. Nevertheless, the slimmer scoring of this preliminary version enables a performance of notable athleticism in the outer movements. Others – John Eliot Gardiner's ORR, for example, albeit on period instruments (Archiv, 6/98) – distil a greater fury in the faster music but Roth takes a different, more collegial view. All of which makes this is one of the most sheerly enjoyable Schumann symphony discs to have arrived in a while, finely played, gloriously recorded. **David Threasher**

Shostakovich • Muhly/Helbig/Long

Muhly/Helbig/Long Cello Concerto, 'The Three Continents'^a **Shostakovich** Cello Concerto No 2, Op 126^b

Jan Vogler VC

^b**Mariinsky Orchestra / Valery Gergiev;**

^a**WDR Symphony Orchestra / Cristian Măcelaru** Sony Classical © 19439 77494-2 (62' • DDD)

^bRecorded live at the Konzerthaus, Berlin, June 3, 2019



A brand-new Cello Concerto – one piece, three composers, 'three continents'.

As Jan Vogler, the commissioner, puts it: 'I'm a German, I live in America, and I'm married to a Chinese woman. My life is enriched by the inspiration I draw from these wholly different continents.' Enter Nico Muhly, Sven Helbig and Zhou Long, each assigned a movement, each invoking a different musical landscape, a different musical sensibility – and fierce individuals, each. And yet the wonder is that they sound like they belong, or are destined to belong, together. The unifying force is plainly Vogler himself. His musical personality defines the piece.

Muhly taps into his energy, propelling his bullet-train of a first movement through a rich and varied landscape. The topography switches with the shifts in emotion and vice versa, now exhilarated, now awed, now agitated, now serene. Then Helbig's slow movement (my favourite – the German connection), which overlays a songful and impassioned 'Aria' over a deep, ebbing orchestral undertow. Vogler, the singer (or as Helbig puts it, 'Vogler's skill in infinitely modulating the tone like a human voice'), is the inspiration that ensures this movement is the heart and soul of the piece. I went back and immediately played it again.

Finally Zhou Long's scherzo-cum-finale, which playfully apes the Chinese guqin (a kind of seven-string zither) and seeks to invoke the spirit of an eighth-century poem 'Song of Eight Unruly Topsy Poets' by Du Fu. There's a wilful cadenza – wilful but none too steady on its feet – and a whole lot of inconsequential carousing. As desserts go, it's certainly heavy on the alcohol.

I have to say that it's not just Vogler but the collective personalities of the WDR Symphony Orchestra that really flesh out the finished product. It would be hard to imagine a more confident first outing for the piece. And likewise, the Mariinsky Orchestra's contribution to the companion work – Shostakovich's searching and extraordinary Second Cello Concerto – is not just exciting but possessed of a truly defining intensity. This marvellous work has 'late' written all over it. From first to last it feels as if it's edging towards an apotheosis. Celebrating (if that's the word) Shostakovich's 60th birthday (back in 1966), it is fifty shades of anxiety.

Vogler and Gergiev above all capture its mordant, even desperate folksiness. It's that edgy irony – as characterised not just in the actorly cello but in the Mariinsky's pungent bassoons, horns and percussion – that really hits home. But then there are these deeply affecting moments like the heart-easing little ritornello (archaic and slightly

sentimental) that is thrice recalled in the finale. Incidentally, the whirling-dervish climax of this movement is sensational here – a flash of 'dementia' if ever there was one. And finally that ticking percussion motif, so significantly originated in the outlandish Fourth Symphony (withdrawn for fear of disfavour), and here enjoying not quite the last laugh. That would be its final appearance in the final symphony. Terrific stuff. **Edward Seckerson**

'Extra Time'

Albinoni La Statira – Sinfonia^a **Brescianello**

Violin Concerto, Bre9^b **Matteis** Cajo Marzio

Coriolano – Ballo^c. Scipione nelle Spagne – Balletto di Cavalieri Romani, Spagnuoli e

Africani^a **Vivaldi** Violin Concertos – RV365 (late version)^d; 'Per la Solennità di S Lorenzo', RV286^e; 'Per Sua Maestà Cesarea e Cattolica', RV171^c

La Serenissima / Adrian Chandler ^{vn}

Signum © SIGCD641 (72' • DDD)

Recorded ^d2011, ^e2015, ^a2016, ^b2018, ^c2019



Adrian Chandler and La Serenissima have had a run of snappy album titles in recent

years – 'The Italian Job', 'The Godfather', 'Vivaldi x2' – yet this one does feel especially well tuned. Its starting point was a concerto captured on the spur of the moment in 2015, when all the music for their 2016 *Gramophone* Awards-shortlisted Vivaldi *Four Seasons* had been recorded 25 minutes ahead of schedule – Vivaldi's *Concerto per la Solennità di S Lorenzo*, RV286, which was supposed to have been recorded the previous year for a collection of Vivaldi's sacred works which had ended up being shelved for cash-flow reasons. While 25 minutes for this concerto was cutting things tight, La Serenissima were able to produce a take eminently worthy of release once Chandler had found it some disc partners – which he then did through building extra time into subsequent sessions.

Fast-forward to the present day, and the great news is that 'Extra Time' is bristling with all the elegantly zesty *joie de vivre* familiar from those previous albums. For instance, remember the glorious climax of Torelli's Sinfonia for four trumpets, timpani, two oboes, two bassoons, two violins, two cellos, strings and continuo on 'The Italian Job' (Avie, 5/17)? Well, Chandler leapt on that opportunity to take down a similarly scored movement of a ballet suite by Nicola Matteis the Younger, which in turn led him to complete and record in its entirety another of Matteis's



Top-drawer music-making: Adrian Chandler (right) with the producer and engineer Simon Fox-Gál during one of the sessions for 'Extra Time'

ballet suites during similarly sized 2019 sessions for 'The Godfather', and the result is a big-guns finale that matches up to the glorious climactic shout of 'The Godfather'.

Still, while La Serenissima know how to raise a roof with panache, there's also all manner of softer moments to savour, such as the quieter brand of joy heard through Chandler's own poised, clean-toned long lines during the *Largo* of the G major Violin Concerto by the little-known, Vivaldi-influenced Bolognese composer Giuseppe Antonio Brescianello. Another quality worth pointing out is the fact that, underpinning all the timbral variety and solo action, is some fabulously sensitive ensemble blending.

One final point worth making is that while I can think of any number of multi-location recordings that play out as an acoustically choppy experience, 'Extra Time' is no such affair. The engineering is as consistent as the music-making is top-drawer and joyous. **Charlotte Gardner**

'Russian Colours'

Arensky String Quartet No 2, Op 35 **Borodin** String Quartet No 2 - Notturmo **Glazunov** Viola (Saxophone) Concerto, Op 109 **Rachmaninov** Vocalise, Op 34 No 14 **Tchaikovsky** String Quartet No 1, Op 11 - Andante cantabile (all arr Zhislin)

Camerata Tchaikovsky / Yuri Zhislin *va*
Orchid © ORC100136 (63' • DDD)



The small and perfectly formed have come into their own during the pandemic with new and existing chamber arrangements making virtue out of necessity and ensembles such as Yuri Zhislin's terrific 19-strong Camerata Tchaikovsky fashioning more of less (or less of more) in pursuit of an expanded repertoire. This latest collection of Russian sweetmeats honours its namesake by cherry-picking some old favourites and reimagining the strange but enticing hybrid that is Glazunov's Concerto for saxophone and string orchestra.

It's a smart idea but I have to say I had my doubts about substituting viola for alto sax in this unexpected opus, not least because it kind of neutralises the anomaly of the piece in its quest to make a born classicist of a jazzy rebel-rouser. For sure, the viola's dusky melancholy sits well in its context (though there are the odd figurations that clearly sound as if they were written for a wind and not a string instrument), but the saxophone's plangency does make for an altogether different brand of wistfulness and it's that tension between the conventionality of its style and the shiny newness of its protagonist that gives the piece its oddball charm. That said, if you didn't know the

original you would happily assume that it had been written for viola and strings – and that is a compliment to Zhislin, both as a player and as an arranger. And heaven knows we need more viola concertos.

For the rest, the new setting of Arensky's String Quartet No 2 takes its lead from the full string-orchestra arrangement of the middle movement Variations on a Theme of Tchaikovsky (his *Children's Song* 'Legend') which achieved greatest popularity in that form and shines here in tandem with Zhislin's expansion of the movements on either side of it. The sombre main theme of the first movement resonates with more of an air of Russian Orthodoxy while the glimpse of *Boris Godunov* in the main theme of the finale becomes somehow more 'operatic' in its projection.

The three perennial (and exquisite) favourites that complete the collection enjoy beautifully nuanced performances. The *Andante cantabile* from Tchaikovsky's First String Quartet is the very epitome of melancholic consolation while the elaboration of the slow movement from Borodin's Second Quartet now invokes more not less of the lushness of its reincarnation in the Forrest and Wright musical *Kismet*. 'And this is my beloved' indeed. As for Rachmaninov's Vocalise, its glorious, unfettered line assumes the ascendancy in whatever voice or voices enjoy the singing of it. **Edward Seckerson**

Brahms's Piano Sonata No 2, Op 2

Alexandre Kantorow talks to Jeremy Nicholas about the least Brahmsian of the piano sonatas

Right at the end of my conversation with Alexandre Kantorow, I happen to ask him what else he is putting on his recording with Brahms's Sonata No 2 in F sharp minor. Just as well, because his answer illustrates perfectly his concept of the work. He sees it as a rhapsody. 'The idea was to do three recordings, each with one of the three Brahms sonatas. Each sonata would go with something. With No 2, I have put Bartók's Rhapsody, Op 1 (a fantastic work written by a young composer, as Brahms was when he wrote his Op 2), Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody* No 11 and Brahms's Rhapsody, Op 79 No 1 – because it has the same motif as the Bartók. In all of them there's a feeling of improvisation and telling stories.'

I'm talking to Kantorow via Zoom in his flat in Paris, where he recently moved – just before lockdown.

At the 2019 International Tchaikovsky Competition, the then 22-year-old became the first French pianist to win the Gold Medal. He was also awarded the Grand Prix (worth \$100,000), only the second time in the competition's history that this has been given to a pianist. One of his winning performances was of Tchaikovsky's Second Piano Concerto. His last release was of Saint-Saëns's Piano Concertos Nos 3, 4 and 5 on a single album (conducted by his father, Jean-Jacques Kantorow), which I had the pleasure of welcoming in the June 2019 issue of *Gramophone*. Here is a pianist of imagination and daring who likes to think outside the box. Is that, I wonder, why he has chosen to do Brahms's Sonata No 2 first? After all, it's by far the least played and least popular of the three piano sonatas composed in 1852 and 1853.

'Well, I think in a way it's probably the least connected to how we perceive Brahms in general. It feels like the huge bold statement of a young composer who is full of ambition, and a lot more like what we can imagine of Schumann and Liszt than Brahms's actual style later on. Even though it's No 2, it was the first one of these to be written. He makes enormous (what for the period could be described as) avant-garde moments of dissonance and structural decisions. It sounds more like a fantasy than a sonata. I think people have a hard time



Kantorow included Brahms's Op 2 Sonata, which he's just recorded, on his programme at the 2019 Tchaikovsky Competition

figuring out the structure. In fact, it is very well integrated and developed from a few motifs throughout the whole piece, but it's not as clear as in his later works, so a lot of people think it's a bit weird and a bit long.'

One reason, I suggest, for its lack of champions is that the final page of the last movement, after much bravura writing, is marked *Molto sostenuto* with dreamy, languorous *pianissimo* textures, ending abruptly with just two very loud chords that come from nowhere. 'Yes,' Kantorow smiles, 'just two chords to get the audience applause! Of course, it won't be as successful as the other two sonatas, which are more outgoing in the final movements. I think the Schumann sonatas are the closest to this work: the abrupt shifts and contrasts – the sudden bursts of passion and then quickly going back. These are not things we find later in Brahms, where everything is a lot more dignified from the emotional standpoint.'

The first movement (*Allegro non troppo, ma energico*) is ostensibly in sonata form but it doesn't feel like that, somehow. 'No,' agrees Kantorow, 'because there is no exposition or feeling of going back home. It feels like one straight journey without the idea of being born again. There is this triad throughout: F sharp, A natural, C sharp – a pattern

which from the get-go is one of the straight paths which he will continue to develop. But he does it so much with mood shifts and abrupt changes that when you come to the *a tempo* marking you don't know whether that means the introduction or something that's just been introduced. Then there's a burst of octaves in the left hand – so he never really shows you a clear path, even if he's still using the same motifs.

'The second movement (*Andante con espressione*) is a set of variations on an old German song, "Mir ist leide". It's a bit weird – about winter and coldness. Again, there's not much clarity. After the theme and one variation, which are pretty strict, the following variations cover the tune rather quickly. It's funny because in the second movements of the other sonatas there are also extramusical ideas. In the Third Sonata there's this poem which he quotes about lovers in the moonlight, and in the First Sonata, it's based on an old German song from the Middle Ages. The second and third movements of Op 2 are connected: the third – the Scherzo – is simply one further variation on the same theme. This was very innovative. I don't know if there was another sonata before the Op 2 that does this.'

'The Scherzo's descent of chords with octaves is so tiring for the hands – in concert you just go for it, hope for the best!'

Most commentators agree that the second and third movements are the most successful. 'Well, they have a clearer structure and no sense of going off the path, as it were. Movements one and four are the extreme ones where Brahms goes off on his own.'

Kantorow has had the piece in his repertoire for the past two or three years. It is one of those that he learnt and then left alone for six months, and then when he returned to it he saw things in it that he had never seen before. 'You know that Brahms is taking you somewhere great, you can feel it, but it took me so much time to grasp it. The connection of the themes – it's very subtle. With some composers, it's so clear when they try this sort of thing. But not here.'

When talking about the piece, Claudio Arrau said he thought the most technically difficult passages were the last page of the first movement and the last page of the Scherzo. 'Yes, he's right. In the former, the jumps for the right hand are pretty tricky because you still have the accents on the first beat. But it's manageable. The bit in the Scherzo is where you have this trill octave-wise and you have to make it sound really powerful, then you have this descent of chords with octaves, but you can't play them using your fifth finger because your fifth finger has to go one note higher than the octave. It's extremely tiring for the hands – and in concert you just have to go for it and hope for the best! The publisher suggested a simplified version where you play thirds instead of octaves, but then it lacks the raw power that it needs. And those trills also appear on the last page of the last movement – like the last movement of Beethoven's Sonata No 30 where the trills for the first time have an expressive value and are not there just for ornamentation. It was my teacher, Rena Shereshevskaya, who told me, 'The last page with the trills – that is where you find true love.'

Kantorow's solo album for BIS, including the Brahms – alongside works by Bartók and Liszt – will be reviewed in the Awards issue

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Peter Quantrill hears a clutch of Croatian string quartets:

'These works belong to the turbulent climate of the 1930s, with troubled lyricism and expanded tonal techniques' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 51**



Richard Whitehouse on a persuasive programme from the Navarra Quartet:

'The Kurtág pieces are disquieting miniatures of an emotional import out of all proportion to their brevity' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 52**

CPE Bach

'Complete Piano Trios'

Linos Piano Trio

AVI-Music © (two discs for the price of one)

AVI8553480 (133' • DDD)



The piano trios of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach were originally published (beginning with Wq89 in 1776) with a cumbersome but more apt title: *Sonatas for the Harpsichord or Pianoforte accompanied by Violin and Violoncello*. And indeed, unlike the trios of Mozart and Beethoven, in which the players share both the duty and the glory, the burden of the main musical line in the Bach works falls on the keyboard player. The cellist often underscores the harmonies while the violinist accentuates thematic material and offers an occasional riposte. The effect is a bit like listening to a gifted but garrulous raconteur, flanked by two admirers who expostulate things like 'Just so ...' and 'Indubitably'.

For the sake of brevity, and to connect these prototype trios to the more elaborate and articulated genera that were emerging in the later decades of the 18th century, the Linos Trio call them simply trios. Gathered here are the original six works, designed for the burgeoning milieu of domestic and amateur music-making, and seven more, including the single-movement Arioso with variations from the last set, a melodic and expressive highlight of the collection. The playing is smart, efficient and alert to Bach's quicksilver changes of mood and material.

But it also seems to be hampered by the decision to think of these works as trios. Consider by contrast the performances of Trio 1790, with their rough-and-tumble fortepiano leading the way, exuberantly, bumptiously and perhaps more effectively than the somewhat tempered performance by the Linos players. Both performances are satisfying but the 1790 players clearly see these works as solo sonatas with two

accompanying lines, and they work better that way. Bach's keyboard-writing is so idiosyncratic, so mercurial in its twists and turns, that one wants the soloist to be just that, a soloist. A committee approach, with judicious collaboration, doesn't work nearly so well.

Nevertheless, there is much to admire in the Linos reading, especially the last track, with the gorgeous aria theme and fleetly rendered variations. This two-disc set also includes the two trio collections Wq90 and 91, published within a year or so of each other, so it offers a better sense of the arc of Bach's creativity in this nascent but fascinating genre. **Philip Kennicott**

Piano Trios – selected comparison:

Trio 1790 (CPO) CPO999 216-2

Beethoven

Piano Trio No 5, 'Ghost', Op 70 No 1.

Triple Concerto, Op 56 (arr Wilsing)

Beethoven Trio Bonn

AVI-Music © AVI8553108 (59' • DDD)

Beethoven

Piano Trio No 4, 'Gassenhauer', Op 11.

Symphony No 6, 'Pastoral', Op 68 (arr Belcke)

Beethoven Trio Bonn

AVI-Music © AVI8553114 (62' • DDD)



Following their lovely disc of the Op 70 No 2 Trio and their namesake composer's own arrangement of the Second Symphony (9/20), two more discs arrive from the Beethoven Trio Bonn. Given the vagaries of international distribution at present, these turn out to be Vols 1 and 3 – not that, in the grand scheme of things, that actually matters much. Both display the many fine points to which listeners were alerted in Vol 2: natural, conversational performances in a clear, realistic sound picture, with keen attention paid to dynamic and expressive markings.

The opening movement of the *Ghost* Trio is tautly played and tightly argued, properly *Allegro vivace e con brio*, while the finale finds an ideal balance between its outward high spirits and the complexity of its interplay between voices. The central movement that gives the work its nickname is launched with truly chilling sounds from violin and cello, and it's hardly Jinsang Lee's fault that his full-fat Steinway can't quite match their etiolated tone. The *Gassenhauer* is perhaps less successful: the gaps between variations in the popular-song finale hold up its continuity, whereas a group such as the Vienna Piano Trio (Nimbus, 7/97) launch into each without pause, to greater cumulative effect.

Once again, though, the couplings are the real revelation, consisting not of music conceived for this grouping but of trio arrangements of orchestral music. The *Pastoral* comes in a reduction by one Christian Gottlieb Belcke (1796-1875), a Thuringian flautist, and fines the forces down without ever making you suspect that these *Landleute* would be any less *lustig* to *zusammensein* with than their full-orchestral counterparts. The Storm, too, is fully involving, subsiding into an eminently satisfying 'Hirtengesang'. The Triple Concerto, though, is something else again. The three solo lines and complex orchestral backdrop are ingeniously distilled by Friedrich Eduard Wilsing (1809-93), a Dortmund music teacher, into a tour de force of virtuosity and contrapuntal intricacy. It's a big piece anyway – especially challenging for the string players – and all three musicians find their parts considerably beefed up in this version: a challenge that is met impeccably by this fine young ensemble. **David Threasher**

Debussy • Dutilleux • Ravel

'Quart de nuit'

Debussy Clair de lune (arr Tony Kime)

Dutilleux Ainsi la nuit **Ravel** String Quartet

Ruysdael Quartet

Deux-Elles © DXL1185 (51' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Grote Kerk Velp, Netherlands, March 18 & April 1, 2017



Developing genre: the Linos Piano Trio convey CPE Bach's quicksilver changes of mood in his complete piano trios



I'd heard of the Ruysdael Quartet but hadn't heard them play until this

disc came my way, and now I regret that it took me so long. Not only are the Ruysdael unfailingly musical, they've honed a formidable technique since their formation in The Hague in 1996 – intonation is spot-on, ensemble razor-sharp and their diaphanous, meticulously balanced sound illuminates every musical strand, even in the most elaborate passages of *Ainsi la nuit*. Indeed, their Dutilleux teems with glistening, sometimes bristling detail. 'Miroir d'espace' creeps and flutters, insect-like, for instance, while 'Litanies II' has an oddly affecting eerie lyricism and 'Constellations' spasms with nervous energy. Most striking of all, perhaps, is how the Ruysdael give shape and direction to Dutilleux's sequence of brief movements and parenthetical interludes; it's a work that can seem episodic but coheres persuasively in this concert performance.

I'm impressed, too, by how scrupulously the quartet attend to dynamic markings.

Listen at 4'24" in the first movement of the Ravel, say, where the opening theme is recapitulated with a *pianissimo* so gentle it's like an exhalation of relief following the development section's tumult. Or turn to the beginning of the *Très lent*, which the musicians paint with chiaroscuro worthy of the group's namesake (the Dutch landscape painter Salomon van Ruysdael). In fact, this is an unusually dark reading; even the *passionné* climax (starting around 5'15") finds the Ruysdael turning inwards rather than surging ahead, as the Arcanto Quartet do (Harmonia Mundi, 11/10). In the finale, on the other hand, the playing is so clearly delineated it's as if they were etching glass.

I only wish they'd given us the Debussy Quartet, too, as the Arcanto and others have done, rather than an encore. That said, Tony Kime's arrangement of *Clair de lune* is effective; and although the Ruysdael's interpretation evokes bittersweet nostalgia rather than a moonlit reverie, it's sheer magic nonetheless.

Andrew Farach-Colton

Deviennes

Trios: Op 17 - No 4; No 5; Op 66 - No 1; No 2; No 3

Le Petit Trianon

Ricercar © RIC416 (72' • DDD)



I have heard Olivier Riehl's flute-playing live in concert. It was a humid evening

in Paris; despite the audience's sweaty discomfort, he held the entire hall in rapture with a cadenza that mimicked a bird in flirtatious call. That this disc begins with the ambience of chirping nature, presumably from outside the Église Notre-Dame de Canteilles where this album was recorded last June, is entirely fortuitous. But it is an intriguing counterpoint that calls to question just what makes Riehl's sound so exquisite (as well as recalling the aesthetic debates of the second half of the 18th century that this repertoire so succinctly explores).

Riehl's pearly tone, exquisitely carved phrasing and tapered mastery of notes that dissolve into silence; this is stuff beyond birdcall. His chamber partners Amandine Solano (violin) and Cyril Poulet (cello) are equally delightful, and as a threesome they do very well to bring these unknown works by François Devienne to life. There are musical moments, however,

beyond rescue – the ornamentation and extreme dynamic scheme in the finale of the Trio in G minor works to foreground the predictability and tedium of it all.

This is where the decision to include trios from the Op 17 collection of the ‘French Mozart’ was wise indeed. The timbral shift from flute to bassoon is most welcome, sweeping froth to the side for liquid mahogany. Xavier Marquis’s playing, particularly in the bass range, is charismatic and peppered with brassy boldness. But he does not quite have the virtuoso flight that some of the scalic passages require to make the listening experience wholly at ease (indeed, sounds of struggle emerge in the *Allegro* from the Trio No 5 in E flat). Nor is he able to deliver the nuance of conversational freedom in the equivalent passages spoken by Solano’s sprightly bow. Indeed, Solano and Poulet are in many ways the unrecognised stars of this album: consistently vibrant and sources of rhythmic fuel. **Mark Seow**

Dunhill • Erlanger

Dunhill Piano Quintet, Op 20

Erlanger Piano Quintet

Piers Lane *pf* Goldner Quartet

Hyperion © CDA68296 (73' • DDD)



The musical style of the naturalised Englishman and banker Baron Frédéric

Alfred d'Erlanger, born in Paris of a French father and American mother, remains an intriguing one. Trained in Paris under Anselm Ehmant, he enjoyed his first successes in opera but later turned to orchestral and chamber music, and many of his large-scale works were associated with the great virtuosos of the time such as Fritz Kreisler, who performed his Violin Concerto in 1903. Much of the polish, formal neatness and brilliant technical prowess brings to mind Saint-Saëns but at times the expansive lyrical manner of the composer's personality is more reminiscent of Massenet, and occasional harmonic corners have that inventive surprise of Fauré's first period of maturity.

A founder member of the Oxford and Cambridge Musical Club in 1899, Erlanger often appeared there as pianist in their regular Thursday soirées. Indeed, he often took part in the performance of his own chamber music, which included his Piano Quintet of 1901. First heard with the Kruse Quartet at the St James's

Hall on March 1, 1902, the work had a marked success and was heard again a few weeks later at the Bechstein Hall, where the composer also showed off his skill as an improviser. There is nothing shy about Erlanger's big-boned first movement and its clear-cut sonata structure, nor the copious melodic ideas of the substantial slow movement with its grand, sweeping phrases. The much shorter Scherzo provides a more gothic, melodramatic interlude before the heroic style of the first movement returns in the finale, notable for its playful contrasting secondary theme which Lewis Foreman, in his informative notes, describes aptly as 'dance-like'.

The Goldner Quartet and Piers Lane give a sonorous reading of Erlanger's score and are equal to its muscular, sturdy temperament; indeed, Lane's impressive execution of the piano part reminds us of just how dexterous a pianist the composer was. The ensemble sound throughout is lush and sympathetic, and never ceases to engage.

The somewhat less dense sound of Dunhill's Piano Quintet, which appeared in 1904, three years after Erlanger's, is no less voluptuous in its scoring, though one is perhaps aware of a greater sense of polyphonic freedom among the strings. There is also something poetically attractive about the flexible nature of the thematic material, in which all four players excel. This is particularly true of the first movement with its passionate climaxes, and the third movement (marked 'Elegie'), whose brooding opening for low viola (redolent of Schumann) is heart-warmingly differentiated from the plaintive second subject. The attractive Scherzo, with its two 'trios', is played with panache and verve, and this same vitality, with a touch of debonair charm, returns in the appealing finale. **Jeremy Dibble**

Kaufmann

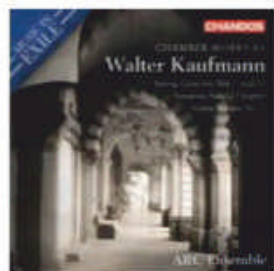
Septet^a. String Quartets – No 7; No 11.

Violin Sonata No 2, Op 44^b. Sonatina No 12

^bErika Raum, ^aJamie Kruspe *vns*

^aKimberley Jeong *vc* ARC Ensemble

Chandos © CHAN20170 (78' • DDD)



Assistant to Bruno Walter, friend of Albert Einstein, author of an

ethnomusicological dictionary in common use today: Walter Kaufmann has not been forgotten since his death in 1984 but his music never surfaced as part of Decca's

Entartete Musik collection or other projects dedicated to Jewish émigrés. Thus it has taken the enterprising Toronto-based ARC Ensemble to make the first recording dedicated to his work as the third instalment of a 'Music in Exile' series, after volumes dedicated to Paul Ben-Haim (9/13) and Jerzy Fitelberg (11/15).

The sinuous, otherworldly character of the album's opening music immediately gives notice of Kaufmann's singular story. Born in Karlsbad (now Karlovy Vary) in 1907, Kaufmann abandoned a promising composing/conducting career in 1933 and sailed to Bombay. There he soon became director of European music for All-India Radio (AIR) and wrote all the music played here, before moving to Canada after the war, thence to Indiana, where he became a popular professor of both Beethoven and 'Oriental Art Music'.

One of Kaufmann's own teachers had been Franz Schreker, composer of *Die ferne Klang*, and his quartet-writing has a 'distant sound' all its own, coloured by the Indian music that he had been studying even before his move eastwards. The slow movement and Trio of the conventionally structured Eleventh Quartet run up and down open fifths and scales in a spirit of meditative serenity. However, there's plenty of Bartókian grit in Kaufmann's oyster: the *Allegro barbarico* indication of the quartet's finale speaks for itself. The Seventh Quartet follows the five-movement plan of Bartók's Fifth, with a spiky, bluesy central Scherzo succeeded by a tremolo-backed *Andantino* evoking the nocturnal air of Bombay rather than Budapest.

The ARC Ensemble have prepared this unfamiliar repertoire with care and a feeling for its beauties. I enjoyed Erika Raum's sweet tone in the brief Second Violin Sonata and her quicksilver repartee with pianist Kevin Ahfat in Kaufmann's sudden turns of thought. He wrote prolifically (including more than two dozen operas), and the ensemble evidently had a job sifting through the output. The modal drift of his harmony can wear thin under prolonged exposure though the individual works show a finely judged sense of when enough and no more has been said. Arranging a Violin Sonatina for clarinet leavens the album's scoring and underlines a jazzy perfume to its mercurial Intermezzo and moody concluding Canzonetta. Deeper, angrier currents course through the single-movement Septet; and if there is more material of its quality in the Kaufmann archives, Chandos and the ARC Ensemble would do everyone a favour by producing a second volume.

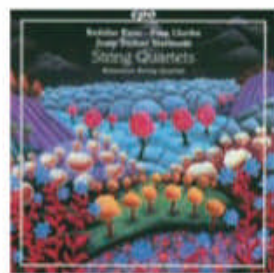
Peter Quantrill

Kunc · Lhotka · Slavenski

Kunc String Quartet, Op 14 Lhotka Elegy and Scherzo Slavenski String Quartet No 4

Sebastian Quartet

CPO © CPO555 297-2 (56' • DDD)



With a meagre legacy of classical music to call their own,

Croatian composers in the first half of the last century drew on folk-music traditions even more than their peers in neighbouring Hungary. All three works belong to the turbulent climate of the 1930s, and they mirror the troubled lyricism and expanded tonal techniques of quartets by more celebrated contemporaries such as Bloch, Milhaud and Bridge. I would be pleased to hear any of them live, especially in performances as assured and wholehearted as these, and I would not feel I had been fobbed off with second-hand Bartók, even in the three-movement cyclical structure and monothematic repetitions of the Op 14 Quartet by Božidar Kunc.

During his lifetime, Kunc was better known as a pianist and as elder brother and accompanist to Zinka Milanov, while Fran Lhotka's career centred on conducting and education, but their sole ventures into

quartet-writing feel like idiomatic as well as personal statements, both written from the heart of the medium and most fully themselves in bittersweet elegiac mode. Quicker movements catch them falling back on folkloristic invention and a brittle, circular momentum.

Josip Štolcer Slavenski is another case entirely, one of Croatian music's most individual voices whose extraordinary *Simfonija Orijenta*, attempting a cantata-history of world religions, is the highlight of a recent Eloquence compilation of 1950s Decca albums from the former Yugoslavia. The concise four-movement Fourth Quartet betrays its orchestral origins as a suite of Balkan dances in the abbreviated opening 'Koknješće' with its stamping, two-against-three rhythms and violent pulse. Cellist Zlatko Rucner enjoys the limelight in the edgy *cantabile* melody of the ensuing *Largo* and an angular Scherzo prepares the ground for the closing 'Teškoto', a Macedonian war-dance recognisably from the same world as early Xenakis in its hard, unbroken surfaces and resistance to tonal development. Spaciously engineered and infused with native sympathy, the Sebastian Quartet's performances leave nothing to be desired except for a more helpful booklet essay.

Peter Quantrill

Say

'Complete Violin Works'

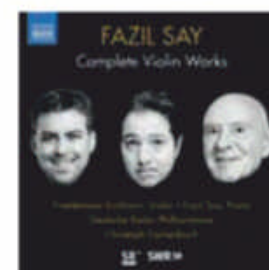
Violin Concerto, '1001 Nights in the Harem', Op 25^a. Violin Sonatas^b – No 1, Op 7; No 2, 'Mount Ida', Op 82. Cleopatra, Op 34

Friedemann Eichhorn *vn* ^bFazil Say *pf*

^aAykut Köseleli *perc* ^aDeutsche Radio

Philharmonie Saarbrücken Kaiserslautern / Christoph Eschenbach

Naxos © 8 574085 (71' • DDD)



Maverick, mercurial, outspoken, charismatic, Fazil Say (b1970) is the composer-laureate

of Turkey, as works such as the oratorio *Nâzım* (2001), *Istanbul Symphony* (2009) and *Hezarfen Concerto* (2011) vividly attest. His relationship with his homeland, not least its religious and political establishments, has been often uneasy, reflected in pieces such as *Gezi Park* (2013-14), for example, inspired by the suppressed protests in the Istanbul park of the same name, or his 2013 conviction for blasphemy, later overturned.

The element of protest is present in the opening – and most recent – work here, the substantial three-movement Second Violin Sonata, *Mount Ida* (2019), inspired by the

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ecological disaster at Mount Ida caused by gold-mining. The movement titles indicate his outrage – ‘Decimation of Nature’; ‘Wounded Bird’ (with its haunted, mutilated evocations of birdsong) – though the culminating ‘Rite of Hope’ is as much about solidarity with those opposing the destruction as the destruction itself.

It is fervently played by Friedemann Eichhorn, for whom it was written. His immersion in Say’s violin-writing pays strong expressive dividends, notable in the unaccompanied test-piece *Cleopatra* (2010), a volatile portrayal of the last pharaoh. The First Sonata (1997) is probably Say’s most recorded work and Eichhorn has its measure, relishing its vibrant blend of influences from central Europe as much as Turkey. His version compares well with Laurent Korcia’s and Patricia Kopatchinskaja’s, if not quite matching the latter’s at times hothouse intensity. I like Eichhorn’s cooler approach, especially in the highly atmospheric and virtuoso Violin Concerto, *1001 Nights in the Harem* (2007). This is arguably the most Turkish work here with its use of Turkish folksong and exotic percussion, brilliantly performed by another regular Say collaborator, Aykut Köseleli. Christoph Eschenbach and the Deutsche Radio Philharmonie audibly enjoy themselves. Naxos’s sound is excellent, making this fascinating and recommendable in equal measure.

Guy Rickards

Violin Sonata No 1 – selected comparisons:

Korcia, Say (3/04) (NAIV) V4954

Kopatchinskaja, Say (1/09) (NAIV) V5146

Stravinsky

Divertimento (The Fairy’s Kiss). Duo concertant. The Firebird – Three Pieces. Petrushka – Danse russe. Suite italienne

Bruno Monteiro *vn* **João Paulo Santos** *pf*

Etcetera © KTC1682 (75’ • DDD)



This is a fine traversal of Stravinsky’s output for violin and piano from two of Portugal’s most distinguished chamber musicians. It is particularly welcome because it eschews fireworks for their own sake. Virtuosity is there, certainly, but what I particularly value here is a sense of intimacy, of mellowness of sound, which is the more surprising since it was recorded in the Cartuxa church in Caxias (just outside Lisbon), hardly an intimate space.

There is a sense of unhurriedness about these performances that makes one consider them in a different light.

Even in the more ostentatiously vivacious movements, such as the Tarantella or the Scherzo of the *Suite italienne*, there is a concentration on the depth of the sound rather than an interest only in musical sparks flying, and the fine balance between violin and piano also contributes greatly to this. It is necessary nonetheless to point out a few technical highlights, such as Bruno Monteiro’s gorgeous harmonics in the Sinfonia and the light, flowing touch in the Scherzo from the Divertimento based on *The Fairy’s Kiss* or, on the part of João Paulo Santos, the deftness of the cimbalom-like repeated notes in the ‘Cantilène’ and the chuntering barrel-organ imitation in the ‘Eglogue I’ from the *Duo concertant*.

Following a beautifully shaded account of the Three Pieces from *The Firebird* (in particular the sparkling Scherzo), we end with the ‘Danse russe’ from *Petrushka*, which screws the inexorable fairy-tale tension up to the maximum, almost as though resuming the entire scenario in one piece. A very fine recording. **Ivan Moody**

‘Love and Death’

Janáček String Quartet No 1, ‘The Kreutzer Sonata’ **Kurtág** Officium breve in memoriam Andreae Szervánszky – Arioso interrotto. Signs, Games and Messages – Ligatura Y **Puccini** Crisantemi **Schubert** String Quartet No 14, ‘Death and the Maiden’, D810 **Turina** La oración del torero, Op 34

Navarra Quartet

Orchid © ORC100135 (80’ • DDD)



The premise behind this album conjures up manifold possibilities, but the Navarra Quartet have devised an illuminating programme. Most perceptive are the ‘elegies’: that by Turina is a rapt if often fervent evocation of a Toreador about to enter the bullring (and skilfully transcribed by the composer from the original for four lutes!), while that by Puccini commemorates a royal bereavement with a pathos that can easily seem mawkish in the more familiar arrangement for string orchestra. No less eloquently realised, the Kurtág pieces risk being submerged in this context – disquieting miniatures of an emotional import out of all proportion to their brevity.

Written almost a century apart, the two larger works viscerally embody those ‘love and death’ archetypes. The first three movements of the Janáček are sensitively

rendered, but the finale lacks just that final degree of drama with which to bring the whole sequence implacably full circle. Nor does the opening *Allegro* (exposition repeat included) of the Schubert evince the necessary drama, yet the soulful ensuing variations are judiciously characterised and finely integrated. The Scherzo ideally elides truculence and wistfulness; the final *Presto* is vividly dispatched if not quite maintaining its initial impetus through to the fatefully decisive close.

An absorbing collection, then, on a par with the Navarra’s impressive release of Pēteris Vasks (5/11). Anyone familiar with incendiary readings of the Janáček and Schubert from the Pavel Haas Quartet (Supraphon, 11/06, 10/13) may find the present accounts a little underwhelming, though the Navarra’s insights have their own rewards, while the recording is a model of ‘quartet sound’. **Richard Whitehouse**

‘Makedonissimo’

Shahov Pletenki, ‘Plaits’

Simon Trpčeski *pf* **Hidan Mamudov** *cl/sax/kaval*

Aleksandar Krapovski *vn* **Alexander Somov** *vc*

Vlatko Nushev *perc*

Linn © CKD636 (83’ • DDD)



Don’t be fooled by the playful title. Simon Trpčeski’s exploration of

Macedonian folk music, born at the 2017 Ludwigsburg Festival and recorded here with a dedication ‘to the people of Macedonia’, is a serious affair shaped by input from ethnomusicologists and ultimately chiselled into form by a composer.

Complex compound rhythms are what consistently tweak the ear in Macedonian folk music. Pande Shahov has arranged groups of them in six contrasting ‘plaits’ – medleys uniting related time signatures. We move from 2/4 (Plait 1) to 13/8 (Plait 6) via 12/8 (Plait 2), 7/8 (Plait 3), 9/8 (Plait 4), and 18/8 and 22/8 combined (Plait 5). The arrangements include well-known songs and dances, their provenance detailed in the booklet. Does the result have the feeling of tavern and street dances dried out and placed under glass? A little. The quintet of piano, violin, cello, clarinet/saxophone/kaval and percussion (both rhythmic and brightly tuned) is staffed by Trpčeski and friends from both distinguished orchestral chairs and the folk music tradition.

The sound of the kaval and the smoky, prayerful vocals (the singer isn’t credited)



As delicate as Mozart chamber music: Simon Trpčeski and his fellow Macedonian musicians celebrate the music of their homeland

are a tonic but it's the rhythms – and their harmonic by-products – that get you: the additions, elongations and irregularities that wrong-foot ears trained further west. Often they are born of the characteristics of the Macedonian language; the song 'Sitna Lisa' from Plait 3 demonstrates how, before Plait 4 goes on to present more quicksilver-like samples. In almost every division of each plait, the rhythm is consistent but the musical conversation (and emphasis of it) cumulative. It is frequently as delicate as Mozart chamber music. Listen carefully and you hear the light-fingered brilliance of Trpčeski's playing (try 'Žetvarki' from Plait 4 for his hand separation, little trills and so on). He keeps himself in the background but close listening proves he's behind many of the most interesting events, whether through Shahov's volition or his own. He finally takes the spotlight in the last number, 'Postupano', a vigorous dance from Skopje in which he could almost be the soloist in a forgotten Bernstein concerto. **Andrew Mellor**

'Les saisons françaises'

L Boulanger Cortège. Nocturne

Debussy Violin Sonata **Poulenc** Violin

Sonata **Ravel** Violin Sonata No 1

Anna Ovsyanikova *vn* **Julia Sinani** *pf*

Stone Records © 5060192 780963 (56' • DDD)



The first thing to say about this debut recording from the young London-based Russian duo of Anna Ovsyanikova and Julia Sinani is that it's refreshing to see Debussy's omnipresent Violin Sonata in some less omnipresent company for once. Yes, to be sure, it's an all-French programme, as is so often the case for this piece. However, their Ravel isn't the 'official' Violin Sonata of 1927 but instead the single-movement Sonata No 1 he penned in 1890 but then abandoned, and which was posthumously published in 1975. Then there's Debussy admirer Lili Boulanger's two pieces for violin and piano, the 1911 *Nocturne* (originally for flute and echoing the *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune* with its opening descending line) and the *Cortège* of 1914, which while hardly profound or groundbreaking are still enjoyable as sweetly perfumed Gallic *bijoux*. Rounding off the programme is Poulenc's Violin Sonata of 1943, and if you're listening digitally then this comes both in its 1943 form and also with Poulenc's 1949 reworking of the final movement, prompted by the death of its dedicatee, Ginette Neveu, in a plane crash.

So full marks for a programme that manages on paper to be both distinctive and instinctive, and these two words could equally be applied to how it sounds. The Debussy itself is notable for sitting at the slower end of the tempo spectrum, whether over the *Allegro vivo*'s time-suspended *meno mosso* and *tempo rubato* markings or in its marked pulling on of the brakes for the concluding movement's *Peu à peu, très animé* section (4'42") preceding the final flourish. Serious and steady rather than fluidly capricious, with Ovsyanikova's attractively full and velvety tones complemented by correspondingly cloaked tones from Sinani, it's all a sound world that I'd have placed as Russian school even had I not known who was playing. So while I've heard a wider range of colours and dynamics in these pieces from others – give me Janine Jansen's more delicate and nuanced Boulanger *Nocturne* any day – it certainly has its own charm, and I love the fruity sharpness and overall ker-pow with which Ovsyanikova opens the Poulenc.

The album was recorded in both the Lutheran Church of St Catherine in St Petersburg and St Paul's, Knightsbridge, and while we're not given the details I'd hazard a guess that the Poulenc was recorded in a different venue to the rest, its violin sounding just a tad closer to the ear. **Charlotte Gardner**

Giuseppe Giacomini

Hugo Shirley pays an 80th-birthday tribute to a sadly under-recorded Italian tenor who handled his career with care and at his finest can stand comparison with the best of them

It's opera quiz time. Who would you name as the greatest Otello of the last three or four decades, the singer best equipped – vocally and temperamentally – for the demands of this most demanding Verdi tenor role? The subject of this profile will already of course have given the game away, but it's probable that only a particular sort of opera lover would suggest the name of Giuseppe Giacomini, who turns 80 this month. His was the voice of one's dreams for the role: big and properly baritonal, immediately recognisable for its dark, oaky richness and its distinctive mixture of 'covered' tone and elemental power.

The voice could be poured out smoothly across the range, from gravelly depths to a top that soars aloft on apparently unending reserves of breath. The thrilling notes, moreover, were tied together by a true legato. The solidity of this remarkable, and probably unique, technique meant that Giacomini's career, a brief vocal crisis in 1980 notwithstanding, lasted some four decades. He was still able, some years after he'd quit the opera stage, to steal the show with a cameo performance on the debut disc of the Armenian soprano Karine Babajanyan (EMI, 9/09 – nla): 'not bad for a gentleman of 68!' wrote John Steane at the time.

Why, then, did this remarkable singer never achieve the superstar status of his Three Tenor contemporaries? The breezy charm of Pavarotti, the youthful intensity of Carreras and the charisma and range of Domingo were not part of his repertoire. The voice itself conjures up troubled depths rather than Mediterranean sunshine, and accounts of his acting, beyond certain specialist roles, are not overly complimentary. But much of it must be down to Giacomini himself: this was an artist, by all accounts, of immense seriousness, whose first concern was his craft and the particularly Italian art and tradition he served. It's telling that when he sang Lohengrin in the 1970s, he did so only in Italy, and only in Italian.

Initially self-taught, Giacomini was born near Padua and trained at the city's conservatoire. He made his debut (as Pinkerton in

Madama Butterfly) in 1966, adding selected roles gradually over the following decade, including such heavier fare as Dick Johnson (*La fanciulla del West*) and Manrico (*Il trovatore*). His career grew in international scope with performances of *La forza del destino* in Paris (1975) and New York (1976), and he later made his debut at Covent Garden in 1980, jumping in for Jon Vickers in *La fanciulla*. He didn't sing his first Otello until 1986 (11 years after his near exact contemporary Plácido Domingo first tackled the role). An interview at the time described him as 'gracious, soft-spoken and introspective', adding: 'Should his performance of Otello, which many consider the most difficult tenor role in opera, catapult him into that rarefied echelon of the tenor superstar, the mild-mannered Giacomini may need coaching in the proper lifestyle and attitude of the true divo.'

That superstardom never materialised, and record companies only showed intermittent interest, with Giacomini appearing on just a handful of major opera sets. He's impressive if a little stiff on James Levine's 1979 CBS *Norma* (now on Sony Classical), but superb as Luigi opposite Mirella Freni in *Il tabarro* on a Decca *Trittico* conducted by Bruno Bartoletti (8/94). His Cavaradossi on Riccardo Muti's Philadelphia *Tosca* (originally Philips, 9/93), might not be the subtlest, but it is a glorious display of a voice in its prime. His Turiddu (*Cavalleria rusticana*) for Semyon Bychkov (also originally Philips, 12/91) is stolid, admittedly, but there's no mistaking the unique quality of the voice, especially in the final minutes.

There are a couple of mightily impressive recital albums on the Italian label Bongiovanni, plus various live recordings.

An hour or two on YouTube will yield plenty more demonstrations of Giacomini at his best: wonderful extracts from a 1991 concert from Seoul, for example, where he sails through a series of grand arias and songs with just piano accompaniment. But it's as Otello that he truly comes into his own. The only official complete recording of him in the role was captured live in Bordeaux in 1991 and originally released

The solidity of this remarkable, and probably unique, technique meant that his career lasted some four decades.

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1966 – *The start of the career*

Makes his professional debut as Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* at the Teatro Civico in Vercelli, northern Italy

• 1976 – *Makes his Met debut in Verdi's La forza del destino*

Makes his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, singing Alvaro in a production conducted by James Levine and starring Martina Arroyo and Sherill Milnes

• 1986 – *Bides his time before taking on Shakespeare's Moor*

Sings his first Otello in San Diego

• 1992 – *Honoured in Austria*

Named Kammersänger by the Vienna State Opera, where he would continue to sing until 2001



on Forlane (3/98 – nla). It's now available only second-hand or via streaming platforms on an 'unofficial' label – you'll have to search for it under the conductor, Alain Lombard, rather than by Giacomini or either of his co-stars, Margaret Price or Matteo Manuguerra.

It's not much of a way to treat the legacy of one of the great voices of the last half-century, but let's hope Giacomini's 80th birthday will be an occasion for yet more people to discover – or be reminded of – his remarkable artistry. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



'Arias' Symphonia Perusina / Guida Maria Guido Bongiovanni

Seek out the 1991 *Otello* if you can, but otherwise this recital album, covering several of Giacomini's key roles, presents an enormously impressive portrait of his underrated artistry.

Instrumental



Michelle Assay hears Chopin Mazurkas from Lukas Geniušas:

'Geniušas's insistent characterisation makes each Mazurka a high-definition tableau' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 59](#)



David Fanning listens to an album born in lockdown from Igor Levit:

'Feldman may win admirers who know that Levit can be trusted to bring fierce concentration to any repertoire he advocates' ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 60](#)

JS Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV988

Lang Lang *pf*

DG (two discs for the price of one) 481 8971;

(F) (2) (C) 481 9736 (93' • DDD)

Deluxe version, with live performance from St Thomas Church, Leipzig, March 5, 2020:

(F) (four discs for the price of two) 481 9701 (3h 5' • DDD)



Hearing Murray Perahia, Andrés Schiff or Angela Hewitt in Bach's *Goldberg*

Variations is akin to absorbing a substantial literary work. Lang Lang, however, offers the musical equivalent of a cinematic epic directed by Robert Altman or Steven Spielberg, with all repeats intact, including the *Aria da capo*. His *Goldbergs* are vividly detailed (sometimes to garish effect), markedly diverse in mood and expression, meticulously thought out in terms of style yet highly subjective, and brilliantly yet not brainlessly virtuosic.

The *Aria* alone indicates what to expect via the pianist's expansive legato lines, chiaroscuro balances and lavish ornaments on the repeats. Following a joyous and incisive first variation, Var 2 settles into a lovingly inflected groove that extends into a billowy Var 3. Like most pianists who start the cross-handed Var 5 at an optimistic clip, Lang Lang's tempo slightly slows down as the music proceeds; ditto with Var 17. The canonic voices in the spaciouly paced Var 9 seemingly emanate from separate pianos, while the often dragged-down Var 12 (the canon at the fourth) gets a refreshingly vigorous reading. At first one fears that the introspective Var 13 will wilt under Lang Lang's muted *cantabile* touch, yet the variation gains force and sinew as it progresses.

In the second half of Var 16 (the French Overture), Lang Lang infuses a dash of ferocity to the usual lilt by laying into the bass lines, although Var 18's self-aware

dynamic dips border on archness. You'd assume that this pianist would speed through Var 20's vertiginous, cascading challenges. Yet his understated approach and attention to off-beats brings the music's two-manual orientation into focus. The celebrated 'Black Pearl' minor-key Var 25 belies its 10-minute duration due to the pianist's rapt concentration and long-range dynamic gradations. The crisp and spirited Vars 26-29 give way to the Quodlibet (Var 30), where Lang Lang's rumination assiduously eases into the final *Aria*.

No major differences distinguish the studio recording from the unedited live performance, save for the latter's more impetuous faster variations, where Lang Lang's facile fingers take unbridled wing. With both versions bundled together, one doesn't need to choose between studio discipline over in-concert playfulness or vice versa. Although fans of the aforementioned pianists may take issue with Lang Lang's *affettuoso* temperament, the consistency of his interpretative vision and his ability to carry it out with conviction and authenticity add up to an entertaining and fulfilling listening experience. **Jed Distler**

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 5, Op 10 No 1; No 7, Op 10 No 3; No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13; No 9, Op 14 No 1; No 10, Op 14 No 2; No 12, Op 26 – *Marcia funebre*; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 15, 'Pastoral', Op 28; No 18, Op 31 No 3. *Andante favori*, WoO57. Rondo a capriccio, 'Rage over a lost penny', Op 129. Rondo, Op 51 No 2

Jos van Immerseel *pf*

Alpha (M) (3) ALPHA594 (3h 34' • DDD)



Few keyboard players are able to match the Beethoven credentials of the Belgian

conductor and fortepianist Jos van Immerseel, who turns 75 this autumn. Pride of place belongs to his complete

Beethoven symphonies with Anima Eterna Brugge (ZZT/Alpha, 6/08), which still stands as a benchmark among original-instrument recordings. Immerseel has also recorded the five piano concertos with Tafelmusik under Bruno Weil (Sony) and huge chunks of the chamber repertory, including two traversals of the piano and violin sonatas, with Jaap Schröder (DHM) and Midori Seiler (ZZT, 11/12) respectively, trios with Vera Beths and Anner Bylsma (Sony), not to mention a miscellany of solo piano pieces.

Immerseel's new three-disc release on Alpha focuses on solo music by Beethoven written between 1798 and 1804, played on a replica of an 1800 Walter piano built by Christopher Clarke in 1988.

There are some genuine interpretative gems here. In the *Moonlight* Sonata, for instance, the *Adagio sostenuto* is nothing short of breathtaking, with the indication *senza sordino* (without dampers) scrupulously observed, creating an ethereal aura of impenetrable mystery that simply can't be achieved on a modern instrument. If the subsequent folk-inflected *Allegretto* seems a little genteel, the *Presto agitato* finale roils and erupts with fine passion and sustained drama.

The *Pastoral* is another beautifully realised conception, with the piano's sonorities skilfully exploited to aid and abet the character of the music at every turn. The opening movement fairly breathes the Viennese countryside, while the *Andante* is haunted by ambiguity. The droll Scherzo precedes a satisfying Rondo that gently sums up with a prescience suggesting Schumann.

The *Marcia funebre sulla morte d'un Eroe* is excerpted from Op 26 as a stand-alone, progressing with a fine solemnity that aptly evokes the massed occasions of public mourning familiar from 19th-century imagery. The tremolandos of the Trio seem the perfect equivalent of cloth-covered drums typical of such occasions.

Indeed, throughout the set, it is the slow movements that are most captivating. The opening of the C minor Sonata



Inner journey: Igor Levit combines the searching intimacy of Morton Feldman with transcriptions by Busoni and Reger - see review on page 60

(Op 10 No 2) is closer to an *Allegretto con prudenza* rather than the *Allegro con brio* indicated. But stick with it and the spacious *Adagio molto* that follows is thoroughly convincing indeed. The pattern tends to prevail. In the great D major Sonata, Op 10 No 3, as well as in the two Op 14 Sonatas, the slow movements eloquently penetrate the crux of the matter, while the quicker outer movements, whether held at an arm's contemplative distance or simply becalmed, seem either enervated or having lost their way.

All told, this is an interesting set, providing intelligent insights and provocative points of view in familiar music played on an instrument similar to that for which it was written. **Patrick Rucker**

Busoni

'Early Masterpieces'

Busoni Danza notturna, Op 13. Danze antiche, Op 11. Una festa di villaggio, Op 9. Gavotta, Op 25. Gavotte, Op 70. Macchiette medioevali, Op 33. Marcia di paesani e contadine, Op 32. Menuetto capriccioso, Op 61. Minuetto, Op 14. Tre Pezzi nello stile antico, Op 10. Cinq Pièces pour piano, Op 3. Prélude et fugue, Op 5. 24 Préludes pour le piano, Op 37. Preludio

e fuga - Op 21; Op 36. Racconti fantastici, Op 12. Scène de ballet, Op 6. Scherzo, Op 4. Scherzo tratto dalla Sonata, Op 8. Suite campestre, Op 18 **Weiss-Busoni Improvisata**
Holger Groschopp *pf*
Capriccio © ③ C5416 (3h 5' • DDD)



Here are all of Ferruccio Busoni's published piano pieces dating from his 11th through 17th years. The legendary pianist/composer may have viewed these works as youthful transgressions to be ignored, yet many possess a high degree of confidence and originality, while occasionally bearing aspects of Busoni's mature style. Seeds of the early Piano Concerto are apparent in the dance forms prevailing throughout the Op 9 character pieces, while its third selection, 'In chiesa', hints at the thick, pillar-like chord-voicings that characterise his Bach settings.

The 24 Preludes, Op 37, follow Chopin's key scheme, yet might be described as the improbable love child of Schumann and Franck. Out of the five movements of the

Suite campestre, Op 18, the finale's undulating low-register chords hold the most interest. Among works recorded here for the first time include a pair of Preludes and Fugues, which basically take Bach on late 19th-century harmonic detours. The three *Racconti fantastici*, Op 12, exemplify Busoni's penchant for using pre-existing music as a jumping-off point for convoluted inventiveness (a trait that he shared with his rival Godowsky, by the way). Its opening piece, 'Duello', wouldn't exist without Contrapunctus II from Bach's *The Art of Fugue*, while the concluding 'La caverna' channels the finale of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata but frames it in ominous tremolos.

Holger Groschopp's polished, full-bodied pianism provides a most sympathetic platform for the young Busoni's aspirations. Here's an example of what I mean: in the final 'Trovatore' movement of *Macchiette medioevali*, Op 33, Groschopp gives breadth and seriousness to the somewhat pretentious rolled chords, whereas Wolf Harden (on his eighth volume of Busoni's piano music for Naxos) races through them. And as excellent as Harden's performance of the wonderful



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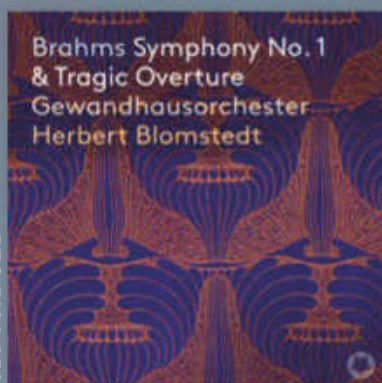
Inspired by the example of Beethoven, Schumann's string quartets display a mastery of traditional forms, combined with typically Schumannian fantasy and lyricism, particularly in the inner movements. As such, they underline a new level of maturity in Schumann's artistic development, surpassing the fantastical aesthetic of previous years. The players of the **Emerson String Quartet** lift out the extraordinary freshness and originality of these works, and add another master composer's quartet oeuvre to their impressive discography.

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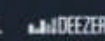
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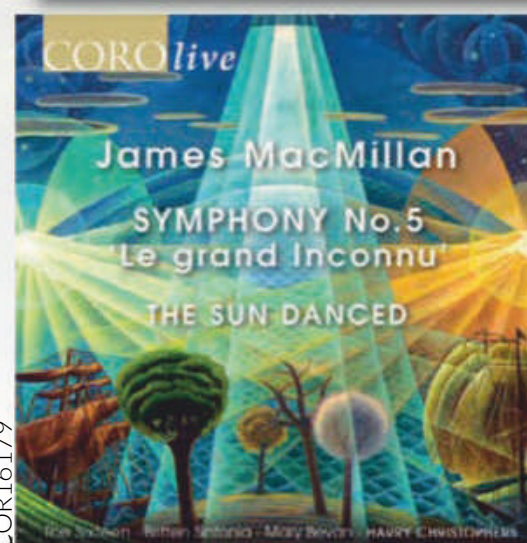


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Scherzo, Op 4, may be (Vol 3), Groschopp varies the *détaché* phrases to a more characterful and rhythmically watertight degree. Well-researched annotations and superb sound will further attract Busoni acolytes to this fascinating and valuable release. **Jed Distler**

Chopin

Piano Sonata No 3, Op 58. Mazurkas – No 3, Op 6 No 3; No 7, Op 7 No 3; No 10, Op 17 No 1; No 21, Op 30 No 4; No 22, Op 33 No 1; No 23, Op 33 No 2; No 24, Op 33 No 3; Nos 39-41, Op 63; No 47, Op 68 No 2

Lukas Geniušas *pf*

Mirare © MIR508 (52' • DDD)



I was blown away by Lukas Geniušas's fantastical storytelling in his Prokofiev

recording (4/19). For his new all-Chopin programme, my reaction is rather more ambivalent. The Lithuanian-Russian pianist delves first into the galaxy of personalities and emotions of the Mazurkas. His selection goes chronologically, covering the full span of Chopin's career, thoroughly exploring every little corner along the way, shaping every gesture, chiselling every phrase and colouring every voice to the point where we approach the fine line between liveliness and aggression, between the stylish and the stylised. Geniušas's insistent characterisation makes each Mazurka a high-definition tableau, reinforced by a sound quality that borders on ferocity in the treble.

That's one way of doing it, for sure. But for the joyful Op 17 No 1, for instance, I would prefer the graceful elegance of Nikita Magaloff (Decca Eloquence, 9/57) over Geniušas's Oktoberfest heartiness. In fact, for me the essence of the Mazurkas is nowhere more truthfully revealed than in Ryszard Bakst's recordings (which somehow never made it to CD, though they are available on YouTube): this is Chopin spoken in the first person and in the mother tongue.

Geniušas's command of large-scale structure is then put to the test in the B minor Sonata. There is much to enjoy here: from his masterly orchestration of the first movement, via the sparkling tracery of the Scherzo, to a soft-lens dreamland in the *Largo*, with some imaginative Impressionistic pedalling. If prolonged reverie is how you conceive this movement you'll find even greater daring (not to say indulgence) in Pletnev's live 1979 Moscow

concert, recently reissued on Melodiya; and for a truly heart-stopping effect look no further than Argerich's breathtaking account (DG) – just listen to those menacing bass notes as they keep undercutting the serenity. Geniušas's finale is a very different affair from the demonic energy that drives Argerich's, in that it has total assurance and never threatens to run off the rails. Nor is there any shortage of dramatic moments in either of the outer movements.

Still, the same tendency as in the Mazurkas towards over-expressiveness from moment to moment occasionally obscures the overall drama, and once again the metallic piano sound does him and the music no favours. For ideal warmth of sound, expression and colour it's hard to beat Nelson Goerner on his EMI Debut disc. **Michelle Assay**

Piano Sonata No 3 – selected comparisons:

Argerich (5/68^R) (DG) 419 055-2GGA

Goerner (8/97^R) (EMI) 636562-2

Pletnev (5/19) (MELO) MELCD100 2581

Dowland

'A Fancy'

Can she excuse. The Right Honourable Robert, Earl of Essex, His Galliard. A Dream. A Fancy – P5; P7; P73. A Fantasia, P71. A Fantasie, P1a. Farewell. Forlorn Hope Fancy. Fortune. Lachrimae. Lady Hudson's Puffe. Monsieur's Almain. The Right Honourable The Lady Clifton's Spirit. Sir John Smith, His Almain

Bor Zuljan *lute*

Ricercar © RIC425 (66' • DDD)



'Melancholy struck Elizabethan England like an epidemic', writes

lutenist Bor Zuljan. Words, as it's turned out, perfect for our own troubled times. As is the music of that most melancholic of composers, John Dowland.

Then again, the performance of the music of the distant past is an inherently melancholy act. Perhaps the extent to which a performer recognises this should be one of the chief criteria for judging their success in any such enterprise? If so, Zuljan succeeds very well here. This is an original, improvisatory yet often deeply introspective recital, masterfully curated, mainly of Dowland's fantasias for solo lute, 'remarkable masterpieces of counterpoint, rhetoric, architecture and virtuosity'.

Zuljan enters, as they say, a crowded field, with fine recordings of Dowland's solo lute music available from masters

such as Paul O'Dette, Jakob Lindberg, Nigel North, Hopkinson Smith and Matthew Wadsworth. They are many years Zuljan's senior. But has any so accurately captured our flawed selves in this distorting infinity mirror hall of Renaissance counterpoint and variations on songs and dances which Dowland himself distorted through endless improvisation?

Performing on a dark-toned eight-course lute after Venere (1582) by Jiří Čepelák (Prague, 2012), with gut strings by Corde Drago, Zuljan draws us gently downwards with the opening descending chromatic melody of *A Fantasia* into a tenebrous world filled with shakes and dissonances, songs and dances troubled by rapid divisions and brooding fancies and fantasies whose contrapuntal tensions invariably lead to calamitous denouements.

The final fantasia, *Farewell*, opens with a chromatic ascending figure, thus mirroring the first work. Zuljan has led us back into the world. But in hushed tones, for night has fallen. **William Yeoman**

Liszt • Thalberg

'Opera Transcriptions & Fantasies'

Liszt Ernani de Verdi – Deuxième Paraphrase de concert, S432. Hexaméron – Morceau de concert, 'Grandes variations de bravoure sur la Marche des Puritains de Bellini', S392

(with contributions by Thalberg, Pixis, Herz, Czerny and Chopin). Réminiscences de Norma de Bellini, S394 **Thalberg** Fantaisie sur des thèmes de Moïse (Rossini), Op 33. Grande fantaisie sur des motifs de Don Pasquale (Donizetti), Op 67

Marc-André Hamelin *pf*

Hyperion © CDA68320 (75' • DDD)



If I were allowed a two-word review of this disc, it would read as follows: buy it.

But then, as a long-term admirer of Marc-André Hamelin, you would expect me to write that. Except that I think this new release is among the very best of all the recordings he has given us, returning, as he does, to the kind of repertoire in which he made his name and in which he is *sui generis*. Just turned 59, the fabulous dexterity, the nonchalant dispatch of the most challenging writing and the ability to convey with the most economic means the sheer physical joy of playing this music are still with him.

Here, though, he appears to have added to his formidable arsenal. As expected, he

conjugates up a rich palette of tonal colours throughout, but to particularly bewitching effect in the two Thalberg fantasies where in places as many as four distinct voices are held separately within the same spectrum. The execution is so incredibly neat and well ordered, and yet sounds completely spontaneous, like an inspired improvisation. And if you are one of those who think Hamelin is too cerebral and emotionally cool, then this will disabuse you. I have never heard him play *fff* passages with such unbridled energy and vehemence. This is a master pianist at the height of his powers.

This cannily chosen programme gives Liszt and Thalberg the chance to shine at their individual best, with *Hexaméron* allowing us to hear them side by side in a compendium of contemporary Parisian piano styles. (Hyperion usefully divides the work into nine tracks to enable the listener to easily follow the sequence of variations by Thalberg, Pixis, Herz, Czerny, Chopin and Liszt himself.) There are too many highlights on this outstanding disc to list individually following this barnstorming opening, though the *Don Pasquale* fantasy is as sprightly as Earl Wild's famous recording (Vanguard, 11/68, 8/92) and Hamelin's own live performance at Husum in 1994 (Danacord, 4/97), while the *Norma* fantasy outstrips Hamelin's earlier recording (Music & Arts, 1992). The final section of the *Moses* fantasy (first encountered on Raymond Lewenthal's stunning but sonically inferior 1975 Angel recording) left me sitting there grinning like an idiot: just when you think all possibilities of Thalberg's famous three-hands effect have been exhausted, he adds another (his audiences used to stand on their chairs to see how it was done). Here, Hamelin's *leggiere* hemidemisemiquaver arpeggios are of the kind that, even if you had followed your mother's advice and practised harder, you would never equal. Not in a million years.

In all this, he has been laudably supported by recording engineer Arne Akselberg in Berlin's Teldex Studio with his longtime producer Andrew Keener. As I said, buy it! **Jeremy Nicholas**

Ravel

'Le langage des fleurs'

À la manière de Borodine. À la manière de Chabrier. Menuet sur le nom d'Haydn. Pavane pour une infante défunte. Prélude. Sonatine. Le tombeau de Couperin. Valses nobles et sentimentales

Ann Martin-Davis *pf*

Guild © GMCD7825 (69' • DDD)



Ann Martin-Davis's new disc of Ravel, subtitled 'The Language of Flowers',

is anchored by the *Valses nobles et sentimentales* and *Le tombeau de Couperin*, leavened by the *Sonatine* and smaller works.

After the little 26-bar *Prélude* of 1913, passed around the room as an *amuse-gueule*, the dance gets under way. Yet for all their artful detail, these *Valses* seem to lack lilt and momentum. If Martin-Davis's *Valses* come in at only roughly a minute and a half longer than those of, say, Bertrand Chamayou on his *Gramophone* Awards-nominated disc (Erato, 3/16), they nevertheless seem very slow indeed. While scrupulously adherent to the score, Martin-Davis tends to pause slightly to delineate phrases and emphasise cadential figures. Add close microphone placement which sacrifices much of the piano's ambient sound and that sense of abandon so characteristic of the *valse* simply evaporates.

Happily, this *Tombeau* is ample compensation for the *Valses*' relative lack of pep. Heralded by a swirling *Prélude*, the appropriately deliberate Fugue, playful Forlane and irrepressible Rigaudon are all *comme il faut*. Earnest innocence in the Menuet provides the perfect contrast before an exciting Toccata, all the more bracing for its *pointilliste* bent. Of the smaller pieces, the *Pavane* stands out for its forthright delicacy and simplicity, its tender melancholy thoroughly convincing. There's a great deal to enjoy in these seasoned performances. **Patrick Rucker**

'Encounter'

Brahms Vier ernste Gesänge, Op 121 (arr Reger)

Busoni Ten Chorale Preludes after JS Bach.

Six Chorale Preludes after Brahms, Op 122

Feldman Palais de Mari **Reger** Nachtlied,

Op 138 No 3 (arr Becker)

Igor Levit *pf*

Sony Classical © 2 19439 78657-2 (99' • DDD)



Bach meets Brahms, with Busoni and Reger as enablers, and they all meet Feldman thanks

to Igor Levit. The chorale prelude arrangements go together so obviously that they must have been coupled more often than I can remember (I recall Paul Jacobs on Nonesuch and at least one complete Busoni). But it's certainly excellent to have them in such fluent, classy performances.

Brahms's *Serious Songs* without the voice feel strangely ersatz to me, but their place in the programme has an undeniable logic. And Feldman's typically quietist, 29-minute (in this slower-than-usual performance) *Palais de Mari*, inspired by Syrian ruins housed in the Louvre, may well win admirers who come to it through an interest in the other composers and who know that Levit can be trusted to bring fierce concentration to any repertoire he advocates.

Levit has been on an extraordinary inner journey through Covid times (see Alex Ross's extended essay about this in *The New Yorker*, May 18, 2020), offering more than 50 online 'concerts', seemingly all decided on the spur of the moment. In his own words, quoted in Sony's thoughtful booklet essay: 'To be able to make music without any outward constraint and spontaneously to choose works that deal with the basic questions of love and death, of loneliness and the possibility of truly loving one's neighbour – all of this has brought a feeling of relaxation to my piano-playing that I had never known until now.' Fine words. But I wish I could say that this relaxation translates fully on to this album. In fact I was surprised to find several of the chorale preludes a little uptight, never plumbing the kind of depths that, say, Brendel brought to *Ich ruf zu dir* (a treasured World Record Club LP, coupled with Busoni's *Fantasia contrappuntistica*, which I'm not sure ever appeared on CD). Nor am I sure the recording quality does full justice to the subtlety of Levit's tonal palette. All in all, then, a highly collectable disc, but not quite the epoch-making one the pianist's stellar image has led us to expect. **David Fanning**

'The French Album'

Chabrier Habanera **Debussy** Estampes –

La soirée dans Grenade. Préludes: Book 1 –

No 2, Voiles; No 5, Les collines d'Anacapri; No 7,

Ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest; No 10, La cathédrale

engloutie; Book 2 – No 2, Feuilles mortes;

No 3, La puerta del vino; No 7, La terrasse des

audiences du clair de lune; No 12, Feux d'artifice.

Suite bergamasque – Clair de lune **Fauré**

Pavane, Op 50 **Rameau** Nouvelles pièces de

clavecin en concerts – L'Égyptienne; Menuets;

Les Tricotets **Ravel** Miroirs – Alborada del

gracioso. Pavane pour une infante défunte

Jorge Federico Osorio *pf*

Cedille © CDR90000 197 (75' • DDD)



I confess that before this I had not encountered Jorge Federico Osorio (born

GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Marc-André Hamelin*

The pianist talks about his recording of opera paraphrases by Liszt and Thalberg, and the virtues and challenges of this still occasionally maligned area of repertoire

Liszt and Thalberg shared a famous rivalry, but what are the key differences in their approach to writing operatic paraphrases?

There's no question that both men knew the instrument to its core and were tirelessly inventive and innovative in the exploration of pianistic possibility, but it's a testament to the piano's potential that they each managed this in very different ways. If a generalisation is to be made, one could say that Liszt tended more towards brilliance, limitless textural invention and harmonic spice, whereas the overriding characteristic of Thalberg's piano-writing is a kind of extreme elegance.

How did you choose which works to include on this album?

Without exception, I've known all five works on the album from very early on, some since childhood. Not by playing them of course, but by being aware of them through repeated listening (although I did try to play some of them as soon as I was able!). I really feel that they are among the best that both composers had to offer in the operatic fantasy genre. In the case of Liszt, I could have included the *Faust* waltz paraphrase or the *Tannhäuser* Overture, but in the end I settled on limiting the present programme to Italian opera. I did play the *Tannhäuser*

Overture many years ago, and it must count as one of the most uncomfortable things Liszt ever wrote – it constantly feels like it was written in the wrong key.

I originally intended to devote a whole disc to Thalberg's operatic fantasies, but the more I explored them, the more I felt disappointed by how poorly many of them held together, despite other qualities. So I thought it best to show Thalberg to his best advantage; I think that *Mosè* and *Don Pasquale* really stand above the rest of his output.

A singing line is obviously crucially important in this music. What other qualities are required to bring it to life?

What I tried to do is to have as much of this demanding writing under pianistic control at all times so that I would only have to concentrate on and highlight the important thread that is the melodic material. Obviously, the music was written to dazzle and to celebrate the glory of the piano, but if all these scales, figurations and roulades are not integrated into something that makes emotional sense and retains the flavour of the original operatic material, then the pianist's toil becomes purposeless.



Once mastered, this music must be enormous fun to play.

Well, when it works, yes! These kinds of pieces feel much better the more one is in shape at the time of performance, but repertoire like this is especially vulnerable to anything less than total preparation and concentration. On another level, I do believe that those pianists who oppose what people like Liszt and Thalberg have done so well, and who refuse to delve into this part of the literature, are depriving themselves of a multi-dimensional area of pleasure. Yes, some of it occasionally lacks subtlety, some of it is in questionable taste, but the best of it is irreplaceable and, dare I say, immortal.

Mexico, 1951) but on this hearing I very much hope to get to know him better. A critic on the *Los Angeles Times* has described him as 'one of the most elegant and accomplished pianists on the planet'. Elegant, yes, and whose playing has a warmth and humanity that I found immensely appealing.

From the first bars of Fauré's *Pavane*, to quote the great Jorge Bolet, 'you know you are in safe hands'. So far as the recorded sound is concerned, captured in the Logan Center for the Arts at the University of Chicago, it's realistic, honest, and with plenty of room to capture the tonal bloom of the instrument, a beautifully voiced Steinway.

And what a cleverly selected programme this is. The Fauré ends quietly on a single (tonic) low F sharp, which becomes the

dominant of Debussy's 'Les collines d'Anacapri'. This is followed by a judiciously chosen further six *Préludes* from Books 1 and 2 with 'La terrasse des audiences du clair de lune' leading to 'Clair de lune' (from *Suite bergamasque*). These will leave you in no doubt that you are listening to a master colourist who does not present them in a washy Impressionist haze but as individually sculpted tone poems. You will, for instance, rarely hear the left-hand quavers at the end of 'La cathédrale engloutie' so clearly yet with Debussy's *flottant et sourd* direction fully realised.

From two centuries earlier, three short pieces by Rameau are far from anachronistic, as one might expect, in this context. After which we are off to Spain for the remainder of the recital: Chabrier's

Habanera neatly eliding into the same languorous dance rhythm for both 'La puerta del vino' (Book 2) and 'La soirée dans Grenade' (from *Estampes*). 'Alborada del gracioso', though a fine performance, does not quite reach the heady heights of Lipatti's benchmark. Osorio ends, as he began, with a pavane, this one a dance that, in the words of the composer, 'a little princess might, in former times, have danced at the Spanish court'. It is played without sentiment and is thereby ineffably more touching.

The recording is released on the Chicago-based Cedille label, a not-for-profit organisation 'devoted to promoting the finest musicians in the Chicago area', funded by contributions from individuals, foundations and corporations.

Jeremy Nicholas

Max Richter

The composer's accessible blend of post-classical and electronic styles tugs at the heartstrings, says Sarah Kirkup

How useful is it to label a composer? Post-classical, neoclassical, post-minimalist, electroacoustic, avant-garde, modernist, sociopolitical ... Max Richter could be said to be all these things – yet not one of these descriptors does justice to how his music makes us feel. Likewise, his sound world – whether for solo piano, string quartet, orchestra or synthesiser – could be described as haunting, contemplative, ambient, atmospheric, nostalgic ... But do any of these adjectives get to the heart of how we respond to it?

It is easy to dismiss his music as 'accessible' – because it is. But if accessibility equals communication, then surely Richter has found a direct line to his listeners' souls. As he tells *Gramophone*, 'It seemed that the terms "complex" and "good" could be used interchangeably. I found that in order to communicate my ideas effectively I needed to develop a simpler language. My work draws on Renaissance compositional practices, as well as electronic music, and favours forms that are legible, with the minimum of ornament. Things that appear simple but are beautifully made are an ideal for me.'

'Making things which feel simple but can convey substantial ideas is my process'

Richter is unapologetic about his desire to make attractive, directly emotional music, even if, as he says, 'beauty is sometimes regarded with suspicion'. This is how he draws the listener in, creating space inside the music which enables one 'to reflect actively on the work while listening'. Tuning in to his music, then, should be a two-way process, requiring commitment from both composer/performer and listener.

Richter was born in 1966 in Hamelin, West Germany, and grew up in Bedford, England. In his teens he became a fan of the German electronic pop group Kraftwerk and a voracious collector of minimalist records, later going on to study piano and composition at the University of Edinburgh and the Royal Academy of Music, London, and then in Florence with the modernist pioneer Luciano Berio. In 1989, after finishing his studies, he co-founded Piano Circus, and during his decade with the group he commissioned and performed works by Brian Eno, Philip Glass, Arvo Pärt, Steve Reich and Julia Wolfe. From 1996 he collaborated with the British electronic pop duo the Future Sound of London on three albums, as pianist and then as co-writer/producer.

It was inevitable that this profusion of influences and experiences, both aural and practical, should lead to the development and subsequent honing of Richter's own musical language – one that combined elements of minimalism and electronica with his inherent proclivity for unfiltered emotional expression. He finally made his solo album debut in 2002: 'Memoryhouse' with the BBC Philharmonic. Reflecting his interest in social narratives of the previous century, it presents a range of inspirations (poetry by Marina Tsvetaeva and John Cage's voice among them) across 18 evocative vignettes – from



Richter has never shied away from writing beautiful, directly emotional music

the swirling strings and wordless intonations of *Sarajevo* to the Nymanesque piano arpeggiations of *The Twins (Prague)*. The album was hailed a neoclassical masterpiece, yet it was clearly much more. As a BBC reviewer wrote, 'Richter's epic, cinematic exploration of sound has echoes in post-rock's more restrained moments (Mono and Sigur Rós are good touchstones), and even in [US band] Beirut's Eurocentric indie folk.'

Already, then, Richter was amalgamating established genres into something that was altogether more affective. Writing broadly tonal music was one way he set about achieving this; creating music containing an explicit message was another. '[It meant] returning to a plain-speaking quality for somebody who isn't conservatoire-trained,' he has said. 'Making things which feel simple but can convey substantial ideas with intellectual rigour is difficult, but that is my process.'

Two years later, in 2004, his desire to communicate 'substantial ideas' culminated in the release of 'The Blue Notebooks'. 'It's an anti-violence record,' Richter said at the time, explaining that the build-up to the Iraq war had galvanised his 'attempt for music to make a subtle and peaceful protest against political, social and personal brutality'. For strings, piano and electronics, and including texts (narrated by actress Tilda Swinton) from Kafka's *Blue Octavo Notebooks*, the album includes *On the Nature of Daylight*, used by film director Martin Scorsese in *Shutter Island* (2010) and described by Richter as 'a very classical piece of writing – a strict bit of counterpoint in a way that an 18th-century composer would recognise', yet with a sub-octave register that's completely electronic. Could there be a better example of Richter's approach to music-making? Label it crossover if you must, call it boundary-blurring if you like, but this is music that refuses to place classical music on a pedestal.

In 2006, Richter released 'Songs from Before', another album for strings, piano and electronics but this time featuring the English musician Robert Wyatt reading excerpts from

RICHTER FACTS

Born March 22, 1966,
in Hamelin, West Germany
Richter on studies with Berio

'My teacher Luciano Berio set me on a course to simplify my language. The specialist and the casual listener will notice different things in my music, but they are both welcome!'

Prizes ECHO Klassic Award (2013): *The Four Seasons Recomposed*; Emmy nomination (2017): BBC drama series *Taboo*

Richter on the power of music
'Even in childhood, music was a place of solace and calm. I was probably quite a sensitive child. I strongly associated music with that ability to provide a space, an opportunity for respite from everyday reality'

literary works by Haruki Murakami. The electronic passages here take the form of manipulated recordings of short-wave radio segments which connect each of the 12 movements, infusing this music with an air of nostalgia to potent effect. The *Pitchfork* review reads, 'Richter's music [is] capable of engendering instantaneous passions, regrets and decisions with simple melodic figures.'

But Richter is capable of having fun too – at least conceptually. Take his 2008 album '24 Postcards in Full Colour' for strings, guitars, piano, drums and electronics, comprising a collection of musical miniatures that can be downloaded as ringtones.

Despite their effectiveness as individual pieces, there is a subtle connective narrative thread between each segment when they're played in order: 'Richter has created a classical, cyclical form of post-ambient music which revels in smooth discontinuities,' wrote Pwyll ap Siôn (A/08), concluding, 'If the sound sources used ... appear less connective ... this calls to mind Cage's fondness for creating new timbres on the prepared piano as if one were collecting pebbles on a beach.'


In 2012, *The Four Seasons Recomposed* saw Richter discarding three-quarters of Vivaldi's work and creating something daringly original for solo violin, chamber orchestra and a smattering of electronics – yet that still pays homage, in terms of gestures and dynamics, to a work that in its use of recurring patterns reminds Richter of minimal music from the 1950s and '60s. 'I picked my favourite bits and made new objects out of them, like a sculptor,' he has said. Daniel Hope, the soloist on the recording which topped the classical chart in 22 countries, summed it up thus: 'It's like he's put the piece through a time machine and brought it into the 21st century.'

Performing live for audiences worldwide has always been integral to Richter's vision as a musician, but his project *Sleep* took this ambition to a whole new level. Thought to be the longest single piece of classical music ever recorded, this 'eight-hour lullaby' for strings, piano, electronics and wordless vocals has been streamed more than 450 million times. Its world premiere was given by the composer and his ensemble at the Wellcome Collection, London, in September 2015, where invited guests were given beds instead of seats. *Sleep* is, according to Richter, an antidote to our frenetic world – an experiment with 'how the mind functions when we sleep, and how music can interact with that'. While the language is simple, structured as a set of variations (a recurring form in Richter's work which allows him 'to play with identity, memory and repetition'), it can be transformative in its accumulative effect.

Richter's newest project, *Voices* (9/20), premiered at the Barbican earlier this year, is similarly ambitious. The work is inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the recording featuring the voice of US actress KiKi Layne and multiple crowdsourced international readings by 'real' people, plus a crackly recording of Eleanor Roosevelt's 1949 preamble. Scored for a wordless 12-voice choir, an 'upside-down'

(bass-heavy) string orchestra, narrator, solo soprano (Grace Davidson both at the premiere and on the recording), solo violin, piano, electronics and percussion, *Voices* – part meditation, part peaceful protest – is Richter's largest-scale composition to date, and potentially his most politically resonant. While we can allow this soothing sonic landscape to wash over us, we can also 'actively reflect' during our listening, knowing that the more we invest, the greater the return.

It's little wonder that Richter is a sought-after collaborator. His music doesn't dictate – it suggests. It paints a picture – in watercolour, not permanent ink. He has contributed music to multiple films, including 2009 Golden Globe-winning *Waltz with Bashir*, and in 2018 *The Four Seasons Recomposed* was presented with puppetry at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. His music is also consistently favoured by leading ballet companies.

For the choreographer Wayne McGregor, theirs is less a collaboration, more 'an exchange of ideas', nurtured by a relationship that has been 'sustained over time'. For Richter, working with McGregor is 'an opportunity to spend time in a world created by another mind'. They made *Infra* in 2008 for the Royal Ballet as a response to the 2005 London bombings, a work in which Richter's expansive, melancholy classical-electronic soundscape is juxtaposed meaningfully with McGregor's lightning-fast contortions. But it was with *Wolf Works* that the duo struck gold. Reflecting Virginia Woolf's exploration of multiple perspectives, this triptych – premiered in 2015 by the Royal Ballet – pares back three of her novels, fusing narrative strands with elements of her own controversial, ultimately tragic life. 'War Anthem' (*Mrs Dalloway*) captures – in its plaintive solo cello and thumping bass drum – the darkness and despair of a PTSD-afflicted First World War veteran to unbearable effect. 'Tuesday' (*The Waves*) is similarly inspiring: structured around the principle of a wave, the music ebbs and flows, different musical lines travelling at different speeds, all underpinned by a ground bass. A soprano soars above the strings as Woolf is pulled down by the current. It's a magical moment on the 2017 recording, but it has even more impact in the theatre – dance, music, film and narration combining to create something majestic, heartbreaking and utterly unforgettable. 

RICHTER ON RECORD

Three mainstay albums for any budding Richter enthusiast

**'Recomposed by Max Richter'**

Daniel Hope *vn* Berlin Konzerthaus CO / André de Ridder
DG (2/13)

Richter skilfully contrasts looped and phased parts of pure Vivaldi – from *The Four Seasons* – with his own post-minimalist, post-rock style.

**'Sleep'**

Max Richter *pf* etc Grace Davidson *sop* ACME
DG

Eight hours of music to be heard in one sitting while asleep (or try the one-hour 'From Sleep' version while awake). Soothing, hypnotic – even cathartic.

**'Three Worlds: Music from Woolf Works'**

Max Richter *pf/synth* German Film Orch Babelsberg / Robert Ziegler et al
DG

Drawn from the score for Wayne McGregor's 2015 ballet, three distinct musical universes each convey different characteristics of Virginia Woolf and her protagonists.

Vocal



Richard Osborne listens to a rarely heard cantata by Rossini:
'Like Handel, Rossini was a master of the art of recycling, of which Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo is a prime example' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



Hugo Shirley finds much to enjoy in a personal album from Jonas Kaufmann:
'And personal is really how it feels: Kaufmann, away from the pressures of big opera stages, relaxed and in his element' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**

Beethoven

Die Ruinen von Athen^a. Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt, Op 112. Opferlied, Op 121b^b
^{ab}**Valda Wilson** *sop* ^a**Simon Bailey** *bass* ^a**Sidonie von Krosigk** *spkr* **Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno; Cappella Aquileia / Marcus Bosch**
CPO © CPO777 634-2 (53' • DDD • T/t)



In the right hands, 'incidental' and 'occasional'

Beethoven, even from the often-overlooked and underrated period of the early 1810s, turns out not to be so incidental after all. But then listeners acquainted with Markus Bosch's fine Bruckner series on Coviello will not be surprised by the spring in the step of the *Ruins of Athens* Overture, the graceful simplicity of the *Opferlied's* phrasing or the powerfully conjured atmosphere at the start of *Meeresstille und glückliche Fahrt*. In all three works he leaves distinguished modern rivals (Tilson Thomas in the *Opferlied* and Chailly in *Meeresstille*, for example) at the starting post, integrating swifter tempos within an unfussy application of period principles.

At a time when the function of statuary is so contested, a really complete account of *The Ruins of Athens* is especially welcome. For the inauguration of the Imperial Theatre in what is now Budapest in 1812, Beethoven contributed a score in his most nationalistic vein to complement the anti-Turkish thrust of a new drama by the hot playwright of the day, August von Kotzebue, positioning the city as a bastion of Austro-Hungarian values, a new Athens. The musical numbers on Leif Segerstam's lethargically paced Naxos recording are linked with heavy-handed chunks of Kotzebue's dialogue, whereas the CPO solution is more imaginative: a new digest of the plot narrated by Athena, as if banished from her home city.

At the drama's climax, a prayer of thanks for deliverance from barbarian hordes, issued by a Sarastro-like high priest with

obligato horns, is answered by a literal *deus ex machina* in the shape of a new statue of the Kaiser. At this point Kotzebue's text, pledging loyalty to the Habsburg monarchy, has been removed – pulled down, you might say – and replaced with verses from Schiller's 'An die Freude' (not the familiar text of the Ninth's finale): an elegant piece of rewritten history, fully explained in the booklet, which should satisfy all but the most diehard imperialists.

Quibbles? The chorus lacks the power and unanimity of the Beecham Choral Society (EMI, 8/58), singing in English and in another, more innocent age. The lovely cello solo twining around the *Opferlied's* second verse deserved some help from the microphones. Otherwise, it's one of the more novel and instructive contributions to this Beethoven year.

Peter Quantrill

Elgar

Sea Pictures, Op 37^a. Falstaff, Op 68^b

^a**Elina Garanča** *mez*

Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim

Decca © 485 0968 (59' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Staatsoper and Philharmonie, Berlin, ^bOctober 14 & 15, ^aDecember 16 & 17, 2019



It's hard on Elina Garanča that her darkly opulent take on *Sea Pictures* should

appear so soon after Kathryn Rudge's superb interpretation with Vasily Petrenko and the RLPO (Onyx, 7/20). With her burnished tone, effortless technique and commanding projection, the Latvian mezzo leaves a most alluring impression, even if her delivery of the text falls fractionally short of the idiomatic, intuitively illuminating ideal. Both 'Sabbath Morning at Sea' and 'The Swimmer' in particular are endowed with an imposing, scena-like grandeur, the mood almost Wagnerian in its brooding intensity. Daniel Barenboim and his excellent Staatskapelle Berlin provide consistently poised,

affectionate and flexible support, nowhere more so than in the entrancing 'Where corals lie' (gorgeously expressive solo cello from three after fig B or 1'06"). Any nagging doubts almost entirely surround a marginal want of impetus, which I fancy may prove irksome on repeated hearings. Not a version, then, to displace my existing favourites – Baker, Greevy, Connolly (twice), Coote and Rudge – but at the very least as distinctive and big-hearted as Marie-Nicole Lemieux's partnership with Paul Daniel and the Bordeaux Aquitaine National Orchestra (Erato, A/19).

Falstaff launches with a playful swagger and snapping vigour that really make you sit up, so it's regrettable to say the least that what I presume to be a dodgy edit deprives us of half a bar at fig 14's combustible *Allegro molto* marking (2'38"). Don't be put off, though: there's much to savour in a reading of narrative flair, keen temperament and striking pathos that strikes me as infinitely more rewarding than this conductor's own LPO account from 46 years earlier. Certainly, Barenboim secures some splendidly vital, detailed and articulate playing in the Eastcheap bustle, Gadshill double robbery and ale-soaked banter at the Boar's Head Tavern, not to mention the hapless manoeuvres of the fat knight's ragged conscripts as they are 'soundly peppered' on the battlefield (try from fig 89 or 1'21" into track 11). I adore, too, those truly *dolcissimo* strings at fig 98 (track 12 – and such melting *ppp* tone for the repeat), as well as the ominously glinting splendour that Barenboim brings to King Henry's coronation procession, whose magnificent *Grandioso* apex in Elgar's engrossing symphonic scheme (at fig 127 or 2'22" into track 15) has exactly the right clinching impact. What's more, the two interludes are memorably touching, No 2's wonderfully tender writing for divided violas and cellos exquisitely judged both here and when it returns in the epilogue (where Barenboim most movingly caresses Falstaff's heartbreakingly wistful final reminiscence of the young Prince Hal).



A smouldering Dalila: the Swedish soprano Klara Ek is supported by conductor Leonardo García Alarcón in a live performance of Handel's *Samson*

An urgently expressive, strongly characterful and agreeably compassionate *Falstaff*, sumptuously engineered into the bargain – but do try and hear the composer's own remarkable recording (EMI/Warner, 6/32) and John Barbirolli with the Hallé from June 1964 (still the most poignant, insightful and life-enhancing version of them all – 12/64).

Andrew Achenbach

Handel

Samson, HWV57

Klara Ek, Julie Roset *sops* Lawrence Zazzo

counterten Maxime Melnik, Matthew Newlin *tens*

Luigi Di Donato *bass* Namur Chamber Choir;

Millenium Orchestra / Leonardo García Alarcón

Ricercar © ② RIC411 (149' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Église Saint-Loup, Namur, Belgium, July 4, 2018



The Dunedin Consort recently demonstrated that the unabridged first performance version of *Samson* (1743) is a complex masterpiece of musical and literary ideas that are conveyed less adroitly in the other uncut recording by The Sixteen. On the

other hand, some performers fear that Handel's longest dramatic oratorio is biting off more than they can chew unless it is heavily cut, or they are forced to make damaging compromises when concerts are planned to finish an hour or so sooner than the oratorio lasts. Nicholas McGegan followed Handel's shortened version from the early 1750s – a sensible option which is still not that short. Leonardo García Alarcón opts 'for the same choices as those made by Nikolaus Harnoncourt, believing them to be the best'. The botched text used for Harnoncourt's flawed interpretation omits more than a quarter of the work (Alarcón's running time is almost an hour less than John Butt's), which cannot possibly bring to life every facet of Handel's epic Miltonic oratorio.

Nevertheless, this live recording captures a panoply of moods and colours abetted by theatrical vitality and predominantly brisk pacing. The horns pack a punch in the overture, the chorus 'Awake the trumpet's lofty sound' vigorously depicts the Philistines' festival worshipping Dagon, during which 'Ye men of Gaza' is sung delectably by Julie Roset; she also sings the Israelite Woman's 'Let the bright seraphim' with sparkling blitheness. Matthew Newlin's Samson over-milks

silences and bellows climactic phrases in 'Total eclipse', and forcefulness in 'Thus when the sun from its wat'ry bed' misses the point. On the plus side, Newlin enacts the prisoner's conflicted feelings of bitter melancholy and acerbic frustration during Dalila's visit, and reawakened conceitedness in his parleying with Harapha. Lawrence Zazzo applies operatic extroversion to Micah's contemplative 'Then long eternity' (reduced to its first few bars) and 'Return, O God of hosts' (taken too fast). Klara Ek's smouldering Dalila is aptly petulant in 'To fleeting pleasures make your court' – although the flanking chorus for her retinue sags under laboured shaping and a dragging tempo. Luigi Di Donato doubles up as Samson's anxious father Manoah and bullying antagonist Harapha: woolly vibrato, lopsided phrasing and poor English enunciation cause Manoah's airs to bulge inelegantly; Harapha's taunting 'Honour and arms' comes across rather better.

Overly florid extemporising in recitatives by the theorbist and cellist might be over-compensation for the total lack of a harpsichord. Its absence also causes counterproductive smothering from anachronistic chamber organ in airs and recitatives. However, the Millenium Orchestra's broad textural palette is

GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

HANDEL'S SAUL

Richard Wigmore compares live recordings of a once-neglected oratorio



Seasoned Handelian: Laurence Cummings directs the Göttingen Festival Orchestra

Handel

Saul, HWV53

Mary Bevan, Sophie Bevan *sops* **Eric Jurenas** *counterten* **Raphael Höhn, Benjamin Hulett** *tens* **Markus Brück** *bar* **NDR Choir; Göttingen Festival Orchestra / Laurence Cummings**
 Accent ③ ACC26414 (166' • DDD • T)
 Recorded live at the Göttingen International Handel Festival, May 18, 2019

Handel

Saul, HWV53

Sherezade Panthaki, Yulia Van Doren *sops* **Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen** *counterten* **Aaron Sheehan** *ten* **Daniel Okulitch, Christian Pursell** *bass-bars* **Philharmonia Baroque Chorale and Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan**
 Philharmonia Baroque ③ PBP14 (141' • DDD)
 Libretto available from philharmonia.org/saul
 Recorded live at First Congregational Church, Berkeley, CA, April 6 & 7, 2019



For all his pomposity and eccentricities, the lordly Charles Jennens was Handel's most rewarding collaborator. The relationship between two men equally matched in stubbornness was famously prickly. But the composer respected Jennens's dramatic gifts, and was even prepared to defer to

his judgement. In *Saul* the Leicestershire squire created perhaps the finest, most cohesive oratorio libretto Handel ever set. The composer, not without chivvying from Jennens, did it rich justice in a work whose depth and variety of characterisation and Aeschylean grandeur he never surpassed.

Long a rarity on disc, *Saul* has been handsomely served in the CD era, with outstanding versions by Gardiner (Philips, 8/91), McCreesh (Archiv, 6/04), Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi, 11/05) and Christophers (Coro, 10/12). If neither of these new live recordings displaces them, both are enjoyable: well sung and characterised, and convincingly (often swiftly) paced by two seasoned Handelians (McGegan was Cummings's predecessor as director of the Göttingen Handel Festival). Both orchestras and youthful-sounding choruses are excellent, with McGegan's San Francisco forces, especially, relishing the ceremonial splendour of the opening tableau, darkly rasping trombones to the fore. While Cummings's NDR singers produce a more smoothly blended sonority, McGegan's choir is that much more vivid with its words. The only disappointment here is the implacable 'Envy' chorus, which begins unsteadily and lacks the cumulative *terribilità* of Cummings's performance.

Of the soloists, Mary and Sophie Bevan, for Cummings, come close to my Handel ideal. Mary, as Michal, communes

tenderly with flute in an assuaging 'Fell rage and black despair', and burns vehemently into 'No, let the guilty tremble'. Sophie, slightly richer of tone, catches all of Merab's diva-ish hauteur and after her 'conversion' sings an exquisitely poised 'Author of peace'. Mingling purity and warmth, McGegan's Michal, Sherezade Panthaki, is hardly less touching than Mary Bevan. His Merab, Yulia Van Doren, has a light, soubrettish timbre: attractive enough, though she sounds a touch shrill in her outraged rejections of David.

Yet on the whole McGegan's performance fields the stronger cast. As Saul, Cummings's Markus Brück – a high baritone in a bass role – is well inside the character, but lacks the sonorous depth of McGegan's impressive Daniel Okulitch and is inclined to equate derangement with shouting. The coloratura of 'A serpent, in my bosom warmed' is evidently beyond him. Without compromising his oaken tone, Okulitch powerfully conveys Saul's descent into madness and terrible final self-knowledge at Endor.

The countertenor Eric Jurenas, the David on the Cummings recording, fields a ringing top register yet tends to sing notes rather than phrases. He is outshone by the rich-toned Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen, whether in a beautifully sculpted 'O Lord whose mercies wonderless' or the noble elegy of 'O fatal day'. While both Jonathans have agreeable lyrical voices, Benjamin Hulett, for Cummings, scores over Aaron Sheehan in incisiveness and clarity of diction. Conversely, McGegan's Witch of Endor lets Handel's skewed, sinister music speak for itself where his counterpart, who elsewhere sings well as the High Priest, adopts a wheezy old crone voice: not to my taste.

While I'm happy to have heard both new recordings, my first choice, as in my *Gramophone* Collection (4/18), remains Harry Christophers, with a uniformly fine cast led by Christopher Purves's outsize, brooding Saul. If you are contemplating either of the new versions, two other factors may sway you. The San Francisco performance is available as a download only, and is, in the note writer's words, 'judiciously trimmed', while Cummings gives Handel's score complete. McGegan's cuts mean the omission of the moralising High Priest (fair enough, though even here we lose some fine music), and a couple of less interesting arias for Jonathan and David plus, less judiciously, a whopping excision near the beginning of the muscular final chorus. **G**

matched by the Namur Chamber Choir's firmness of commitment and expressive flexibility: the Israelites' petition in 'Hear, Jacob's God' (its archaic suspensions borrowed from Carissimi) is slower than usual and has an affecting emotional gravitas, and the choir quickly transform into gloating Philistines worshipping Dagon with paganistic horns and chuckling oboes ('To song and dance we give the day'). Alarcón's conception and whimsies are often questionable (the Dead March is accelerated to an almost breezy canter), but some memorable moments offer valuable insights. **David Vickers**

Selected comparisons:

Concentus Musicus Wien, Harmoncourt

(2/94^R) (WARN) 2564 69260-2

Sixteen, Christophers (8/97^R) (CORO) COR16008

Göttingen Handel Fest Orch, McGegan

(8/09) (CARU) CARUS83 425

Dunedin Consort, Butt (12/19) (LINN) CKD599

Kastalsky

Requiem for Fallen Brothers

Anna Dennis *sop* **Joseph Beutel** *bass-bar*

Cathedral Choral Society; The Clarion Choir;

The Saint Tikhon Choir; Kansas City Chorale;

Orchestra of St Luke's / Leonard Slatkin

Naxos © 8 574245 (64' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Washington National Cathedral, Washington DC, October 21, 2018



Kastalsky's Requiem was written as a response to the First World War. Its

genesis was complicated and it exists in a number of different versions. These are usefully detailed in Vladimir Morosan's informative booklet note, and one of them, based on the Orthodox service for the departed, has also been recorded by The Clarion Choir (Naxos, 10/18). This version, for considerably larger forces, is not only ecumenical but inter-religious. As well as the Orthodox texts in Slavonic one would expect from Kastalsky, there are movements in Italian, French, Latin, Greek and English; but more than this, there is material from Catholic and Anglican traditions, and reference to Asian participation in the conflict (notably the 'Hymn to Indra').

Morosan explains the composer's original plan, which 'envisioned a stage set depicting a church, the figure of a cardinal, youths in white vestments, three nurses – British, Romanian and Italian – a Greek clergyman, groups of Russian peasant women, Montenegrins, Serbs and Americans, Hindu soldiers and priests,

a Japanese religious procession, as well as a choir that functioned both liturgically and as an ancient Greek theatrical chorus'. This version was never performed, however, and the subsequent political history of Russia naturally explains the disappearance of this extraordinary work until recently.

Kastalsky's monumental intentions are evident right from the beginning. There is a grandeur about the work, a breadth to its melodic writing and a richness of scoring that relate it not only to the Western tradition of concert Requiems such as Verdi's but make it a precursor of Russian settings of these texts by composers such as Artyomov and Schnittke. Its ambitious nature does not overwhelm it, and there are many moving moments of intimacy (the 'Confutatis' and 'Lacrymosa' are good examples). The three soloists and four choirs involved have really grasped what is needed to communicate this complex work, and Slatkin's driven direction of the Orchestra of St Luke's means that the tension never lets up. It may have had to wait until now to be revealed to audiences but this is an extraordinary work and this fine recording will, I am convinced, ensure that it acquires a permanent place in the repertoire. **Ivan Moody**

D Lobo

Alma redemptoris mater. Audivi vocem de caelo. Christmas Responsories a 4. Missa Elisabeth Zachariae. Missa Sancta Maria Cupertinos / Luís Toscano

Hyperion © CDA68306 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Following their Award-winning debut disc for Hyperion (1/19),

Cupertinos turn their attention to Manuel Cardoso's contemporary, Duarte Lobo, not to be confused with the slightly older Spaniard, Alonso Lobo. As it happens, both Lobos based Mass cycles on motets by the master of the previous generation, Francisco Guerrero. Of the two recorded here, *Missa Elisabeth Zachariae* is the more outgoing and is instantly likeable, but the *Missa Sancta Maria* is in no way inferior. The disc opens with Lobo's best-known work, *Audivi vocem de caelo*, which is rendered very transparently; both Masses are recorded here for the first time, but just as significant a premiere is the set of eight four-voice *Christmas Responsories*, whose missing tenor part has been reconstructed. For aficionados of Golden Age polyphony, this is all self-recommending.

That's all without Cupertinos' distinctive qualities, which are as evident here as on their debut: a very open sound, with the astringent tones of the female singers very much to the fore thanks to an equally bright acoustic. This programme is more balanced, however, in that solemn and joyful music are equally represented. As to the performances themselves, the presence of two 'Christe' sections suggests that the polyphony for the *Kyries* of both Masses was meant to alternate with chant, but this strong hint isn't taken up. The approach is as engaging as before but florid passages can sound fluffed (near the start of 'Quem vidistis, pastores?'), and the singers sometimes pull up short at the style's trademark dissonances, like a racehorse shrinking before a hurdle (about a minute into the *Credo*); such moments only work when they're cleared with confidence.

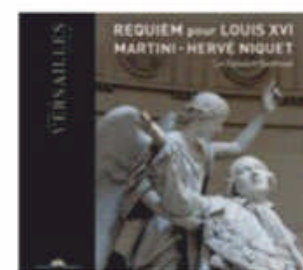
The booklet notes, translated from Portuguese, are uncharacteristically laboured, and I can see no practical benefit to the listener in Hyperion's recent habit of giving each subsection of motets and Mass movements a track of its own, which yields nearly 70 of them.

Fabrice Fitch

JP Martini

Requiem pour Louis XVI

Adriana Gonzalez *sop* **Julien Behr** *ten* **Andreas Wolf** *bass* **Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet**
Château de Versailles Spectacles © CVS022
(57' • DDD • T/t)



Bavarian-born Jean-Paul-Gilles Martini (1741-1816) settled in Paris and was

promised a senior court post in 1788, just in time for this to go pear-shaped in the Revolution. He escaped to Lyon during the Reign of Terror, and after his return to Paris became professor of composition at the newly established Conservatoire and provided music for Napoleonic state occasions. Upon the restoration of the monarchy, Louis XVIII confirmed Martini's position as *surintendant de la musique du roi* (delayed by 26 years), and his Requiem setting (composed 1811) was performed at Saint Denis during the reburial of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette on January 21, 1815 – the 22nd anniversary of their execution.

Recorded in the chapel at Versailles, Le Concert Spirituel's large contingent of winds (pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets and trumpets, four bassoons, four horns, four trombones including buccin, and serpent),

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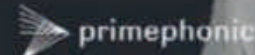
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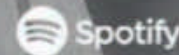
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harp, cymbals, tam-tam and timpani are optimised by Hervé Niquet's fervent conducting. The launch of the Introit has supernatural timbres. Martini throws the kitchen sink into 'Dies irae', moving from jagged unison strings and bold choral exclamations into violent tremors and piercing trumpet fanfares. The full force of the choir causes shrillness from sopranos occasionally but the communication of extrovert imagery is stupendous, and interleaving reflective passages provide shaded respite.

Andreas Wolf's stentorian 'Liber scriptus' is accompanied by a rich orchestration featuring solo horn (too receded here). A terrifying 'Rex tremendae' gives way to an imploring duet setting of 'Ingemisco' sung with steely muscularity by Adriana Gonzalez and Julien Behr. The over-the-top 'Lacrymosa' and tense Offertory are not for the faint-hearted. However, the *Sanctus* is more intimate, with a solo-soprano *Benedictus* that seems closer to *ancien régime* Grétry than to Cherubini. 'Noli meminisse' elicits gentle choral singing and sonorous sweetness from lower strings. The furious F minor 'Amen', with crashing tam-tam and furiously blaring brass, hardly grants us peace. Niquet's thrilling account is more imposing than a 2017 Bavarian live recording that was undermined by an amateur choir under strain. An uncredited bonus Marseillaise, led by Behr's soaring tenor, has irresistible swagger. **David Vickers**

Comparative version:

Banda, Riedelbauch (CHRI) CHR77413

L Mozart • WA Mozart

L Mozart Litaniae Lauretanae BMV **WA Mozart**

Mass in C minor, K427 (reconstr Leisinger)

Carolyn Sampson, Marianne Beate Kielland *sops*

Benjamin Bruns *ten* **Douglas Williams** *bass*

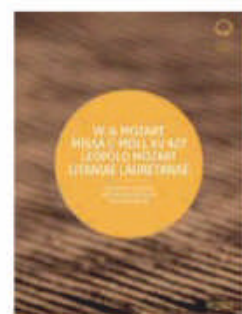
Salzburg Bach Choir; Camerata Salzburg /

Andrew Manze

Belvedere (E) 08057; (F) 08058

(79' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Grosser Saal, Mozarteum Foundation, Salzburg, August 5, 2019



His tercentenary and its aftermath have shown how there is so much more to Leopold Mozart than silly sound-effect symphonies and overbearing fatherhood. A *Missa solemnis* issued last year (Aparté, 8/19) was long taken as the work of his son, and there is plenty in this charming Litany that shows why Wolfgang turned for

musical guidance first to Leopold. It is very much in the Salzburg church style we hear in similar works by the young genius, despite a certain melodic ordinariness I noted in the Mass. It might have made a stronger impression were it not for the unavoidable feeling that the lion's share of the rehearsal time went on the concert's second half, as betrayed by some ragged entries and uncertainty among strings and choir.

The annual Salzburg Festival performance of the grand C minor Mass of Mozart *filis* is a fixture along the lines of Beethoven's Ninth at Bayreuth or rudely deflating balloons at the Last Night of the Proms. It usually takes place at St Peter's church, where it is thought to have been first heard in 1783; last year, however, it decamped to the city's Mozarteum Foundation while the church was being titivated.

A further innovation is the use of a new edition, prepared by the Mozarteum's director of research, Ulrich Leisinger. This not only reconstructs anew the eight-part writing in the *Sanctus* and *Benedictus* but, most importantly, provides the missing instrumental parts in the opening two movements of the *Credo*. (Unlike some other recent editions, no attempt is made to contrive music for the sections Mozart didn't compose.) Thus the 'Credo in unum Deum' is bedecked with trumpets and drums, while the 'Et incarnatus est' is furnished with new string parts that provide a subtle bed for the glorious soprano cantilena with solo flute, oboe and bassoon.

The Mozarteum's Grosser Saal unfortunately lacks the sort of church acoustic that would soften the sharper corners of the performance and perhaps efface the sibilance of 'suscipe' and 'in excelsis'. The two sopranos acquit themselves well, with Marianne Beate Kielland agile in the 'Laudamus te' and Carolyn Sampson – a veteran of C minor Masses – radiant in the 'Incarnatus'. Perhaps the tempo for the 'Gloria' is a tad careful; the 'Credo' shifts oddly in and out of focus; but the fugues at 'Cum Sancto Spiritu' and 'Hosanna' come off admirably.

The Camerata Salzburg field modern instruments but with natural trumpets and shallow timpani with hard sticks. Filming is not particularly imaginative – shots sometimes switch to sections just as they lower their instruments, for example – although the Mozarteum's gilded organ is a delight. Not a Mass for the ages, perhaps, but a worthwhile opportunity to hear a new view of Mozart's 'other' great (unfinished) sacred masterpiece. **David Threasher**

Rossini

Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo

Eleonora Bellocci, Leonor Bonilla *sops* **Marina**

Comparato *mez* **Joshua Stewart, Mert Süngü** *tens*

Górecki Chamber Choir, Kraków; Virtuosi

Brunensis / Pietro Rizzo

Naxos (E) 8 574282 (58' • DDD • S)

Recorded live at the Trinkhalle, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 24 & 26, 2018

Italian text available from naxos.com



Rossini was 24 and recently arrived in Naples when, early in 1816, he was

commissioned to provide the music for a masque in honour of the marriage of Princess Maria Carolina, Ferdinand IV's granddaughter, and the Duc de Berry, second son of France's future Charles X, for whose coronation in 1825 Rossini would provide an even more elaborate *pièce de circonstance*, *Il viaggio a Reims*. The year 1816 was an extraordinary one for Rossini, beginning with the Rome *prima* of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, carrying on through this wedding entertainment and the vernacular Neapolitan comedy *La gazzezza*, and ending with the twin triumphs of *Otello* in Naples in early December and *La Cenerentola* in Rome seven weeks later.

Like Handel, Rossini was a master of the art of recycling, of which *Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo* is a prime example, with music originally written for opera houses in Bologna, Ferrara, Venice and Milan newly recruited to the colours. He even drew on *Il barbiere*, from which he concocted a magnificent showpiece aria for the goddess Ceres. 'Even when Rossini is making a patchwork, the music never loses direction', noted Riccardo Chailly, conductor of the memorable 1998 Decca recording of *Le nozze di Teti e di Peleo*. 'In the end, he seems to be saying exactly what he wants to say.'

Le nozze was a royal commission, and Rossini had vocal royalty to realise it: Margarita Chabrand and Giovanni David in the title-roles, Isabella Colbran as Ceres, Andrea Nozzari as Jove. As did Chailly in Milan in 1998, with a cast headed by Juan Diego Flórez as Peleo and Cecilia Bartoli as Ceres, with Elisabetta Scano, Daniela Barcellona and Luigi Petroni sure-footed in the attendant roles.

The new Naxos disc, recorded live at the 2018 Rossini in Wildbad Festival, proffers no such riches. As a performance, it offers us what you might call the rough up and down of the work, but the singing is rarely

more than mediocre. Leonor Bonilla and Marina Comparato make some pleasing sounds in the duet between Ceres and Juno, but Bartoli and Barcellona offer those and more besides.

The Decca disc has a warmer, more intimate acoustic and a pleasing fill-up in the form of the 16-year-old Rossini's cantata *The Lament of Harmony on the Death of Orpheus*, with Paul Austin Kelly as the tenor soloist. It also has a complete text and translation and a predictably fine booklet essay by Philip Gossett. Naxos's note is generous in length – getting on for 4000 words – but it says nothing about the music. **Richard Osborne**

Comparative version:

Chailly (6/01) (DECC) 466 328-2DH

Sheppard

Media vita in morte sumus

Alamire / David Skinner

Inventa © INV1003 (17' • DDD • T/t)



John Sheppard's monumental antiphon *Media vita in morte sumus* ('In the midst

of life we are in death') is one of the most arresting works of Tudor England. This 16'30" EP (recorded in 2012) is freshly released and newly edited to reflect the likely liturgical practice of Sheppard's day following research by Professor John Harper and Jason Smart. In brief, the canticle *Nunc dimittis* appears immediately after the initial plainsong incipit *Media vita*, following which the whole of the *Media vita* antiphon is sung followed by the usual verses and short invocations without the repeats heard on older releases. The result is a distilled, striking work accompanied by a thoughtful booklet note reminding us that the composer lost his life in London's 1550s influenza epidemic.

Alamire perform *Media vita* at a pitch where their tenors shine particularly brightly. In their hands this polyphony has a lower centre of gravity than the famous recording by The Tallis Scholars (Gimell, 1/90), yet it retains a similar sheen. I particularly admire the pace of the opening, which finds an atmosphere of wonder as the richness of Sheppard's polyphony is unveiled. Although I retain a fondness for the high-pitched performances of English Tudor music pioneered by David Wulstan and The Clerkes of Oxenford, this new release from Alamire is magnificent and unmissably poignant in these times of pandemic.

Edward Breen

Tarkiainen

The Earth, Spring's Daughter^a. Saivo^b

^aVirpi Räisänen *mez* ^bJukka Perko *sop sax*

Lapland Chamber Orchestra / John Storgårds

Ondine © ODE1353-2 (71' • DDD • T/t)



Outi Tarkiainen is a composer of rare moral conviction and geographical

attachment, with a longing for the far north that once saw her move to Ivalo in Arctic Finland (while there, she wrote her 2019 Proms commission, *Midnight Sun Variations*). Her music is filled with longing and latent anger, much of the latter stemming from her sympathy with the plight of the Sámi, the reindeer herding communities of northern Norway, Sweden and Finland that form Europe's only surviving indigenous tribe. *The Earth, Spring's Daughter* is the world's first notated song-cycle setting the Sámi language, using assorted poets chosen by the composer. There are shades of Kaija Saariaho, Aulis Sallinen and Alban Berg (a big inspiration) in her music but Tarkiainen is her own person.

And this score is her magnum opus to date – a monodrama that rails against the oppression of the Sámi and the plundering of the universe with varying degrees of politeness, while forming a symmetrical cycle reflecting the Sámi belief in continuous renewal. The title also hints at a Sámi creation myth, spoken in the Prologue before being sung (and extended) in a powerful epilogue, which feels newly distant. Before that, following songs of pain, longing and fleeting beauty, the mezzo-soprano becomes one with the earth; the music is sucked up into a vortex and thwacking chords echo the final transmigration of the soul into nature, à la Sibelius's Fifth. The whole piece is an acute response to text but the vocal writing never tries to be novel and the music always speaks of more than its immediate subject. Räisänen sings it with feeling but reserves real differentiation of colour for the prologue and epilogue.

The saxophone concerto *Saivo* also takes its inspiration from Sámi culture. The title refers to the tribe's sacred places generally but also specifically: the mythical double-bottomed lake underneath which an inverse reality lies. The sense is of a ritual and the invocation of natural phenomena, which works well with the saxophone's vernacular sound (it can also conjure up the spirit of the *yoik*, the Sámi's traditional prayer-like song). We feel the

instrument's almost animalistic vulnerability acutely: crying and wailing in the third movement before being forced on to a ledge; sucked into another frenzied vortex in the last movement, blowing in an improvised frenzy in the process. It is a bold and powerful moment – wonderfully realised by Perko – but there's plenty of tenderness and depth elsewhere, as well as a telling feeling that we're only hearing the half of it. Storgårds and his Lapland orchestra play this music like they own it – which, in some ways, they do.

Andrew Mellor

'After Silence'

JS Bach Cantatas: No 147 – Jesu bleibet meine Freude; No 150 **Britten** Hymn to St Cecilia, Op 27 **Byrd** Civitas sancti tui. Ne irascaris Domine **Chesnokov** Spaseniye, sodelal **Dove** The Three Kings. Vertue **Ešenvalds** The Long Road **Fauré** Requiem, Op 48 – Pie Jesu **Gibbons** Drop, drop, slow tears **Harris** Bring us, O Lord God **Mahler** Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen **Monteverdi** Lagrime d'amante al sepolcro dell'amata **Parry** There is an old belief **Pärt** The Deer's Cry **Paulus** The Road Home **Stopford** Lully, lulla, lullay **Ticheli** Earth Song **Whitacre** A Boy and a Girl. Sleep

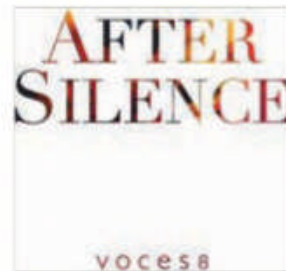
Voces8 / Barnaby Smith with **Mary Bevan** *sop*

Sam Dressel *ten* **Nick Deutsch** *ob/cor ang*

Andrea Haines *ocarina* **Alexander Hamilton** *org*

Academy of Ancient Music

Voces8 © (two discs for the price of one) VCM129A (128' • DDD • T/t)



Anniversary releases carry a certain pressure – a need to define, represent,

embody. Do you gather up your greatest hits or strike out into new territory, return to what you do best or startle and surprise? Celebrating their 15th anniversary this year, the British vocal ensemble Voces8 have refused to make the choice. The double disc 'After Silence' gives them space to do it all and it's the breadth – not just of repertoire but of sound, technique and approach – that makes it so arrestingly excellent.

With Decca the eight-voice *a cappella* ensemble moved increasingly into atmospheric, often over-produced albums aimed squarely at the easy-listening market. With 'After Silence', released on their own label, the group return to their classical roots, and remind us of their chameleon ability to tackle everything from Bach, Mahler and Monteverdi to Britten and Ešenvalds on its own terms and to rival the specialists while they're at it.



John Storgårds and the Lapland Chamber Orchestra play the music of Finnish composer Outi Tarkiainen as if they own it

Take Monteverdi's *Lagrime d'amante* – the exquisitely dolorous sestina the composer wrote to mark the death of soprano Caterina Martinelli. Vivid and boldly shaded through all the voices, operatic in expression but pinpoint-precise in acoustic, it couldn't be further either from the warm bath of choral blend we open with in anthems by William Harris and Parry (recorded in Trinity College Chapel) or the gut-string rasp and snap of Bach's early cantata *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich* (No 150), in which the group join forces with the Academy of Ancient Music.

The musicianship here is dazzling, and nowhere more so than in Britten's *Hymn to St Cecilia* – mercurial and responsive in its conductorless precision, taking risks with tempo and volume but always pulling them off. It's exhilarating to see the Britten and Bach programmed alongside popular choral classics such as Stephen Paulus's *The Road Home* and Whitacre's *Sleep*, and if the album's four 'chapter' divisions ('Remembrance', 'Devotion', 'Redemption', 'Elemental') seem a little interchangeable in theme, the listening experience flows smoothly, offering just enough fizz and friction in a programme dominated by the slow and radiant.

Everything has been captured lovingly but truthfully, allowing us to hear the individual voices behind the group's signature blend. The result is the best thing Voces8 have done in ages. I can't wait to hear what comes next. **Alexandra Coghlan**

'Flax and Fire'

'Songs of Devotion'

Britten Cantic No 1, 'My beloved is mine', Op 40. Um Mitternacht **Browne** To Gratiana dancing and singing **Liszt** Tri Sonetti del Petrarca, S270a **Purcell/Britten** Man is for the woman made **Schumann** Geisternähe, Op 77 No 3. Mein schöner Stern!, Op 101 No 4. Stirb', Lieb' und Freud!, Op 35 No 2. Widmung, Op 25 No 1 **Wolf** Eichendorff Lieder - No 3, Verschwiegene Liebe. Mörike Lieder - No 9, Nimmersatte Liebe; No 32, An die Geliebte; No 33, Peregrina 1

Stuart Jackson *ten* **Jocelyn Freeman** *pf*
Orchid © ORC100139 (60' • DDD • T/t)



A former Oxford choral scholar – though he hardly sounds like one – Stuart Jackson has made his mark on disc as a sturdy Mozart tenor with Ian Page's

Classical Opera Company (*Zaide*, 10/16; *Il sogno di Scipione*, 10/17 – both Signum). In partnership with the ever-sensitive Jocelyn Freeman, Jackson proves just as persuasive in the Britten items that open this recital. He saltily savours the 'increasing dottiness' (the composer's words) of Motteux's text in the rollicking Purcell arrangement 'Man is for the woman made'; and encouraged by Freeman's limpid touch, he finely captures the changing moods of the cantic *My beloved is mine*, from impassioned declamation to the stillness of 'He is my Altar' and the quiet rapture of the close. A lovely performance, this.

Reservations creep in with the German songs. Skilfully as Jackson negotiates the coiled lines of Britten's 'Um Mitternacht', I miss a close engagement with Goethe's subtle text. His German, while correct enough, sounds slightly too casual, here and in the Wolf and Schumann. Freeman is exemplary, whether taking the lead or in discreet support. But after her magical introduction to Wolf's 'Verschwiegene Liebe', Jackson seems matter-of-fact. While his tone falls agreeably on the ear, I hear little inner intensity in the Tristanesque elegy of 'Peregrina', no twinkle of humour in a po-faced

‘Nimmersatte Liebe’, no sense of transcendence at the mystical close of ‘An die Geliebte’. And at this dogged tempo the potentially ecstatic ‘Widmung’ remains earthbound.

In Liszt’s *Petrarch Sonnets* – probably written as a salon showcase for the great Rubini – Jackson has the right sort of voice and the right instincts. Unfurling an operatic fullness of tone, he is exciting, if slightly relentless, in declamatory mode, fearlessly nailing the top Bs and D flats of Liszt’s high alternatives. Where *bel canto* sweetness is called for, above all in the third sonnet, he is merely pleasant. Compare him with Matthew Polenzani (Hyperion, 1/11), who shades and caresses the Bellinian lines with an ideal liquid legato. In the disc’s English envoi, Denis Browne’s languorously elegant ‘To Gratiana dancing and singing’, Jackson is again wholly in his element, with the same care for the colour and meaning of words as in his Britten. Perhaps I’ve been unfairly Beckmesserish. Jackson’s healthy tenor and fine musical instincts are a pleasure in themselves. Yet on this evidence his Lieder-singing remains work in progress.

Richard Wigmore

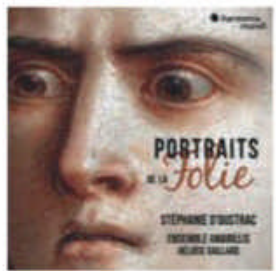
‘Portraits de la Folie’

Campra Les fêtes vénitiennes – Accourez hâte-vous (Air de la Folie) **Destouches** Le Carnaval et la Folie – Abandonnons le soin du monde; Gavotte en rondeau; Souffrez que l’Amour vois lie. Sémélé – Aussitôt le bruit du tonnerre ... Est-il un destin plus heureux; Ne cesse point de m’enflammer **Eccles** Ground in F minor **Handel** Ah! crudel nel pianto mio, HWV78 **Heinichen** Concerto a 7, S214 **Keiser** Jodelet – Sinfonia **Marais** Caprice in E minor. Sémélé – Descendez cher amant **Purcell** Don Quixote, Z578 – From rosy bow’rs. From silent shades, Z370 **Rebel** Les éléments – Air pour l’Amour: Rondeau

Stéphanie d’Oustrac *mez*

Ensemble Amarillis / Héroïse Gaillard

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2646 (67’ • DDD • T/t)



The figure of ‘La Folie’, announced here in an impulsive air from André

Campra’s *Les fêtes vénitiennes*, was a perennial favourite in French Baroque ballets and masquerades. ‘Without love and folly there are no happy moments’, she proclaims in the tart gavotte that ends Stéphanie d’Oustrac’s typically enterprising recital – though the poor women of Purcell’s ‘From silent shades’ and ‘From rosy bow’rs’, driven out of their minds by love, might jabber in protestation.

Symbolising the follies and excesses of love, the alluring figure of Semele appears here in solos by Destouches and Marin Marais. South of the Alps, the hopelessly smitten swain pines for his heartless beauty in Handel’s Roman cantata *Ab! crudel nel pianto mio*, ending with a glimmer – only a glimmer – of hope that his constancy will be rewarded.

A natural stage animal (her calling cards include Carmen and Charlotte), d’Oustrac brings a passionate intensity to these portraits, amorous, grieving or deranged. With her wide range of colour and her care for the sound and sense of words, the French mezzo makes each character vividly distinct. She is also a risk-taker, unafraid of a harsh or whining tone where apt, yet never resorting to caricature. Some distorted vowels reveal d’Oustrac as a non-native speaker in the Purcell mad scenes. Yet so vital is her characterisation – the shades of anguish, desolation and febrile gaiety unflinchingly caught – that you hardly notice, and certainly don’t care. Lubriciously savouring each syllable, she exudes a dangerous sexual urgency in Campra’s ‘Air de la Folie’, and embodies both Semele’s erotic longing and the poignancy of her destruction, all colour bleached from the tone.

In the Handel cantata, especially, purists might prefer a smoother, more even line. D’Oustrac can swoop and bulge in the intensity of the moment. That said, this is another compelling portrayal, with d’Oustrac eloquently exploiting the dark core within her glowing mezzo. Throughout the recital Ensemble Amarillis are ideally fiery and/or sympathetic accomplices. The plaintive oboe-voice dialogue in the final aria of the Handel epitomises the close interplay between singer and instrumentalists. On their own the players relish the anarchic pizzazz of the Keiser sinfonia that opens the disc and the spirited banter of a concerto grosso by Heinichen – a delightful discovery, this. The concept is imaginative, the repertoire (Purcell apart) hardly familiar, and the performances both probing and enlivening. Emphatically recommended. **Richard Wigmore**

‘Selige Stunde’

Beethoven Adelaide, Op 46. Ich liebe dich, WoO123 **C Bohm** Still wie die Nacht **Brahms** Da unten im Tale, WoO33 No 6. Wiegenlied, Op 49 No 4 **Chopin** In mir klingt ein Lied **Dvořák** Als die alte Mutter, Op 55 B104 No 4 **Grieg** Ich liebe dich, Op 5 No 3 **Liszt** Es muss ein Wunderbares sein, S314 **Mahler** Rückert Lieder – Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen **Mendelssohn** Auf Flügeln des Gesanges, Op 34 No 2. Gruss,

Op 19a No 5 **Mozart** Das Veilchen, K476. Sehnsucht nach dem Frühlinge, K596 **Schubert** Der Jüngling an der Quelle, D300. Der Musensohn, D764. Die Forelle, D550. Wandrers Nachtlied II, D768 **Schumann** Mondnacht, Op 39 No 5. Widmung, Op 25 No 1 **Silcher** Ännchen von Tharau **R Strauss** Acht Lieder aus Letzte Blätter – No 1, Zueignung; No 8, Allerseelen **Tchaikovsky** Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt, Op 6 No 6 **Wolf** Mörike Lieder – No 12, Verborgenheit. Eichendorff Lieder – No 3, Verschwiegene Liebe **Zemlinsky** Selige Stunde, Op 10 No 2 **Jonas Kaufmann** *ten* **Helmut Deutsch** *pf* Sony Classical © 19439 78326-2 (70’ • DDD)



Jonas Kaufmann is nothing if not versatile. Just a few months ago I was

reviewing his new recording of *Otello* (7/20), and now comes his latest album, a personal selection of lieder brought together during the height of the Covid lockdown. And personal is really how it feels: this is a very different Kaufmann, far away from the pressures of the big opera stages, relaxed and clearly in his element, allowing his natural artistry and affinity for the repertoire to shine through.

The sense is heightened by a programme that has an old-fashioned feel to it, and more than a hint of nostalgia. It’s an unapologetic selection of favourites assembled in a loose narrative that takes us from amorous anticipation, through full-blown passion, to withdrawal. A few songs are translated from their original language into German; a couple would normally be classified as bordering on kitsch – Chopin purists might want to steer clear of ‘In mir klingt ein Lied’, for example, which puts Ernst Marischka’s sentimental verse to the tune of the ‘Tristesse’ Étude, Op 10 No 3.

But even that is difficult to resist when performed with such naturalness and ease here by the superstar tenor. Admittedly those years of singing the biggest operatic repertoire have taken their toll. You notice a certain amount of strain and effort, a lack of honeyed tone (especially evident in Schumann’s ‘Mondnacht’), and the fact that the tenor’s *pianissimos* are too often a breathy croon. The opening ‘Der Musensohn’ doesn’t exactly skip along as it might, either.

But there’s ample recompense in the richness and the power of the voice and the charisma. And what makes this selection so enjoyable is the evident



A return to classical roots: Voces8 show their supreme musicianship in music ranging from Bach and Monteverdi to Britten and Ešenvalds – see review on page 70

enjoyment of Kaufmann himself: there's a special heartfelt sincerity to Carl Bohm's 'Still wie die Nacht' (something of a Wunderlich speciality), a freshness to Mendelssohn's 'Auf Flügeln des Gesanges', a moving straightforwardness to Friedrich Silcher's 'Ännchen von Tharau'. A beautiful account of 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' provides a moving, thoughtful conclusion.

The tenor occasionally encroaches a little too far into Heldentenor territory in some of the other repertoire, but the whole programme is characterised by a genuineness of expression and sincerity that are difficult to resist. Helmut Deutsch's piano is not in the best condition but his typically superb playing underpins an eminently likeable album that, a few quibbles aside, offers a great deal to enjoy.

Hugo Shirley

'Voices of Angels'

JS Bach Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit, BWV668 **Dean** Voices of Angels **Gubaidulina** Ein Engel. Meditation über den Choral 'Vor deinen Thron tret ich hiermit' **Rachmaninov** How fair this spot, Op 21 No 7. Music, Op 34 No 8 **Schnittke** Hymn II **Wagner** Wesendonck Lieder – No 1, Der Engel

Christianne Stotijn *mez* **Andrej Power, Lawrence Power** *va* **Stockholm Syndrome Ensemble**
BIS (F) BIS2344 (64) • DDD/DSD • T/t)



There's a post-Nietzschean agenda to this programme, according to Paul Griffiths's booklet note, but neither Gubaidulina nor Schnittke, for example, would recognise the idea of the 'death of God'. So it's more complex than this idea implies, and, I would suggest, actually more interesting.

Brett Dean's *Voices of Angels* is a very substantial work, making his customary detailed sonic investigations into the ensemble's possible combinations of instruments, and doing so with a tremendous sense of drama. Its two movements come in at around 28 minutes: it's a significant addition to the chamber literature. Gubaidulina's *Ein Engel*, a setting of Else Lasker-Schüler for mezzo-soprano and double bass, similarly arises from near-inaudibility, and the composer, like Dean, has always been similarly

interested in sonority as a structural component (and, it must be said, as a spiritual symbol). What is particularly interesting here is the way the double bass is left to take over from the voice later in the piece, as though they were two aspects of a single voice.

The two Rachmaninov songs included, beautifully sung though they are by Christianne Stotijn, may seem to be odd choices for a programme such as this but in fact they convey atmospheres that seem to continue those of the contemporary works. Gubaidulina's unpredictable and buzzing *Meditation über den Choral* is followed by Wagner's song 'Der Engel', which really is a stylistic shock, but thematically it is of course perfectly integrated. To end with the second of Schnittke's instrumental *Hymns* is inspired. It brings together both the aspects of spiritual exploration and sonic research found here, and the idea of the chorale. And on the subject of sound, the recording is wonderfully clear, doing full justice to these powerful performances which range over the full dynamic spectrum.

Ivan Moody

WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Peter Quantrill**'s point of departure is ...

Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607)

What kind of man is Orpheus? A musician and poet, gifted equally with voice and instrument. Whose is the first voice heard in opera's first masterpiece? La Musica's voice.

From the very stirrings of the genre onwards, opera has celebrated the unity of notes and words while examining its own power.

Can music really conquer death? This is Orpheus's ambition when, foreshadowing Christ's Harrowing of Hell, he persuades the Furies to release the soul of his snake-bitten wife, Eurydice.

In Ovid's retelling, Orpheus fails at the last, undone by anxiety and lack of faith that she has followed him. Up to that point, as a lover and lamenter, Orpheus is a creature of the madrigalian age, fighting extinction with music: I sing, therefore I am. Led by the countertenor-turned-director Claudio Cavina, La Venexiana bring much practical experience in madrigalian proto-operatic repertoire to their *Gramophone* Award-winning recreation of *Orfeo*'s premiere at the court of Monteverdi's Mantuan patrons.

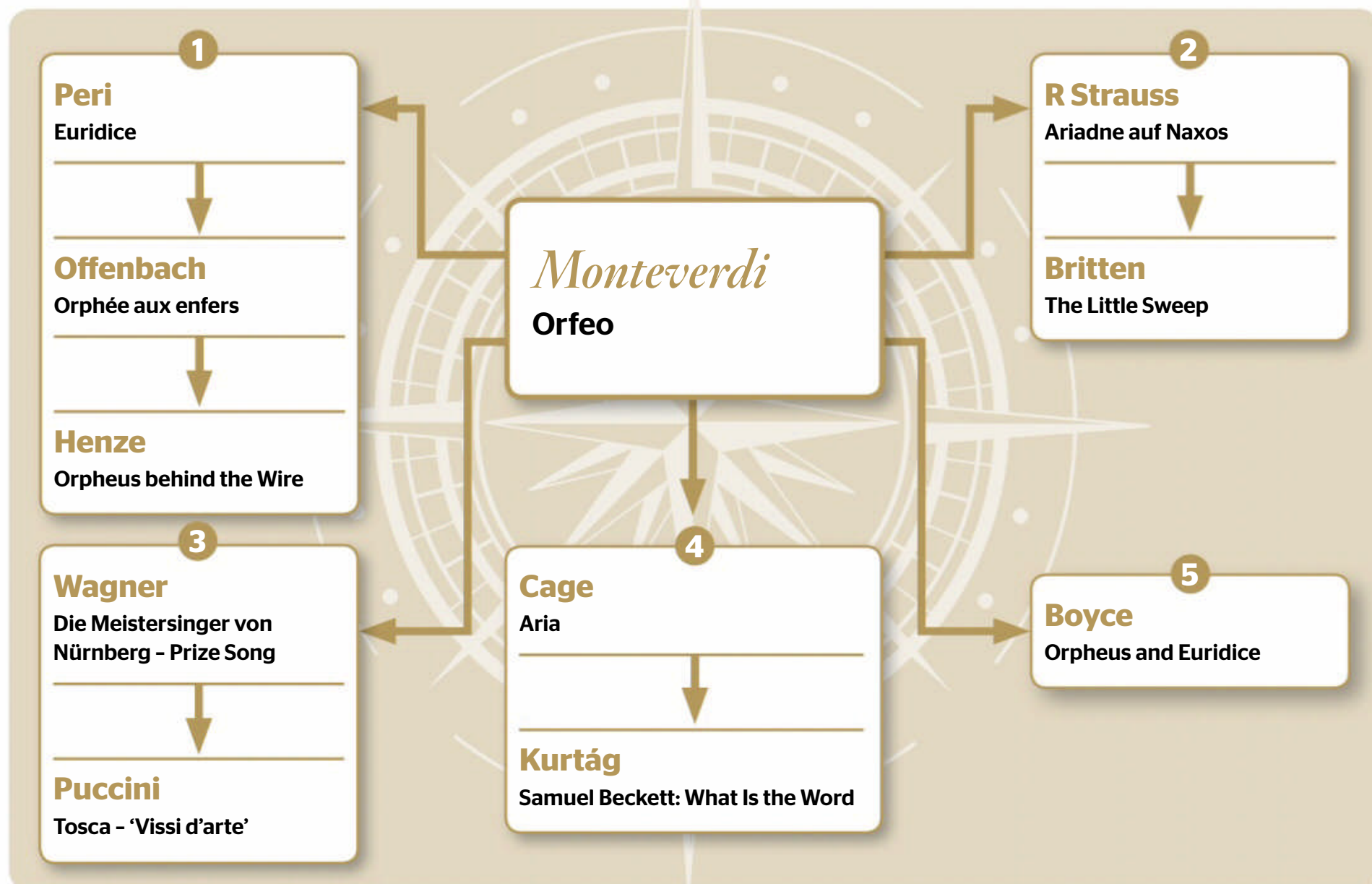
● La Venexiana / Cavina (Glossa, 11/07)

1 *The Orpheus thread*

Peri Euridice (1600) Monteverdi's choice of subject matter was hardly coincidental. Seven years before *Orfeo*, the rival Medici court in Florence had celebrated a politically significant marriage with not only lavish but disparate *intermedi* but also a newer, tighter union of speech, song and dance. Setting Rinuccini's Ovid-inspired text, Peri resisted the temptation to decorate each image (sun, poison, hell), thus placing the burden of characterisation, physical as well as musical, on the singers. As if to campaign for this manifesto of aesthetic integrity, the singer-composer himself performed the role of Orpheus at the work's premiere in the Palazzo Pitti. In the title role is Katalin Károlyi, the charismatic singer-actor who inspired from Ligeti a late song-cycle.

● Katalin Károlyi *mez et al*; Les Arts Baroques / Podeur (Maguelone)

Offenbach Orphée aux enfers (1858) Alphonse Daudet, author of the story *L'Arlésienne* and pioneer of a naturalism that would soon





Orpheus and Eurydice (1862) by English painter Edward John Poynter – oil on canvas

become *verismo*, maintained that Offenbach was the source and not merely the sidelong chronicler of Second Empire manners. Here, for once on stage, is Orpheus as the complete musician of classical legend, both singing and playing (a violin) to charm the Furies, and doing so with an authentically Aristophanic reversal of convention – as a hero who is a henpecked husband who must be bullied by Public Opinion to reclaim his wife.

● Yann Beuron *ten* et al; Lyon National Opera / Minkowski (Warner, 1/99)

Henze Orpheus behind the Wire (1983) The history of Orpheus is one of dark and liminal spaces between music and words. Representing us, he ventures in search of the lost love that will make him whole. In Henze's choral settings of five poems by Edward Bond, Orpheus looks back, with 'more strings on this lyre than hairs on my head', to the realm of a modern Hades, the Argentinian prison camps of the 1970s where dissidents were 'disappeared'. In the fourth song the poet sees Eurydice in his dreams, and Henze's harmonies are suddenly filled with the Brahmsian light of a recent madrigalian tradition.

● SWR Vocal Ensemble; Ensemble Modern / Creed (SWR Classic, 1/18))

2 Let's make an opera!

R Strauss Ariadne auf Naxos (1912, rev 1916) What makes this the ultimate meta-opera? Is it the Prologue's Composer, the washed-up diva of the Opera proper or the score's liberal neoclassicism? Is it the drama's distance and enchantment, so intrinsic to the Orpheus legend and so suited to Richard Strauss's temperament? All of these, surely, plus the unique cocktail of tragic and comic spirits – more subtly mixed than Offenbach's giddy brew – that arose from the work's convoluted origins and intense correspondence between Strauss and his librettist Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

● Anna Tomowa-Sintow *sop* et al; Vienna Philharmonic / Levine (DG, 5/87)

Britten The Little Sweep (1949) Long before 'outreach projects', Britten and his librettist Eric Crozier conceived an 'entertainment for young people' – *Let's Make an Opera* – in which a cast of children and adults would write, rehearse and perform an opera together: *The Little Sweep*. Rescued from servitude, Sammy is the sweep who journeys from the hell of a Victorian chimney to the womb-like temporary comfort of a trunk borne away to safety, his uncertain future nimbly captured in the brittle chamber scoring.

● David Hemmings *treb* et al; English Op Group / Britten (Heritage, 8/56)

3 On singers ...

Wagner Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg – Prize Song (1867)

Death is the ultimate goal of Tristan; in his next opera, Wagner hymned new life and the reviving power of music. The musical iconography of the Prize Song is of baptism; the quintet is sung as a christening song on the first day of summer before Walther, having suffered and survived his own hellish trial at the hands of the Masters, takes on the armour of light – 'Morgenlich leuchtend' – as the apotheosis of the Minnesänger, the singer-poet bards of medieval Germany, in whose lineage Wagner thus places himself.

● René Kollo *ten* et al; Vienna Philharmonic / Solti (Decca, 9/76)

Puccini Tosca – 'Vissi d'arte' (1899) Playwright Victorien Sardou was (unsuccessfully) sued for plagiarism by Ernest Daudet over the crucial backstory of his heroine, crafted with Sarah Bernhardt in mind: Floria Tosca is herself a soprano, a diva. Puccini soft-pedalled or stripped out plot details which convey this – no regal setting or audience for her cantata performance, no cameo for Paisiello as a *maestro di cappella* – because they are superfluous. When she sings her credo 'I lived for art, I lived for love', Tosca becomes an Orphic embodiment of the artist as creator and performer at once. For an authentically Greek expression of singing as life, there can only be one Tosca.

● Maria Callas *sop* La Scala Orch / de Sabata (Warner, 12/53)

4 ... and singing

Cage Aria (1958) With *Les noces* and other works, Stravinsky had loosened the fraying ties of illustration whereby words could be expected to elicit a limited and increasingly tired range of musical expression. Writing for the *bel canto*-trained Cathy Berberian, post-war composers such as Berio and Cage returned an authentically Orphic agency to the singer not merely to interpret but to own and embody the material – which in the case of *Aria* ranges beyond notes and words (in 10 different languages and many more idioms) to a new, graphically conceived vocabulary. Berberian herself brought what she called the 'Monteverdi mentality' to its realisation.

● Cathy Berberian *mez* (Wergo)

Kurtág Samuel Beckett: What Is the Word (1991) Writing for the singer-actress Ildikó Monyók who had lost the power of speech in a car accident, Kurtág composed the painful process of regaining it, syllable by slow syllable, documented in a kind of stop-motion compositional photography, and supported by a small ensemble of voices and instruments as if they were friends and therapists. The poem set is Samuel Beckett's last work, whose gaze – like Orpheus's in Hades – is irresolutely fastened somewhere 'away over there'.

● Ildikó Monyók *voice* et al; Ens Anton Webern / Abbado (DG)

5 And finally...

Boyce Orpheus and Euridice (c1760) The hero and his love enjoy a happy ending in the first of Boyce's pair of comic songs (the second being 'An Answer to Orpheus and Euridice'), for 'such power has music in hell'. However, Thomas Lisle's text receives a cynical riposte worthy of Aristophanes and Offenbach, 'the Words by a Lady', in which Pluto persuades Eurydice 'she'd be happier in Hell'. It's simple, strophic stuff when compared with the affective supplication of Henry Lawes's 'Orpheus' Hymn to God' on the same album. The power lies in the telling.

● Emma Kirkby *sop* Anthony Rooley *theorbo-lute* (BIS, 3/03)

Available to stream on Apple Music

Opera



Mark Pullinger finds mixed results in Puccini's *Il tabarro* from Florence:

'María José Siri's dark spinto makes her perfect for Puccini's soprano roles, and she's an intense Giorgetta' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**



David Vickers on Vinci's *Gismondo* from Max Emanuel Cencic:

'The Polish band crackles with vigorous theatricality – the Sinfonia bursts with full-throttle energy and tension' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**

Janáček

The Cunning Little Vixen^a. Sinfonietta^b

Lucy Crowe *sop* Vixen
Sophia Burgos *sop* Fox/Hen
Irene Hoogveld *sop* Jay
Jan Martiník *bass* Badger/Parson
Paulina Malefane *sop*
 Owl/Woodpecker/Forester's Wife
Gerald Finley *bar* Forester
Peter Hoare *ten* Schoolmaster/Cock/Gnat
Jonah Halton *ten* Innkeeper
Anna Lapkovskaja *mez* Innkeeper's Wife/Dog
Hanno Müller-Brachmann *bass* Harašta

^aLSO Discovery Voices; London Symphony

^aChorus and Orchestra / Sir Simon Rattle

LSO Live ② ③ LSO0850D (120' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

^bSeptember 18 & 19, 2018; ^aJune 27 & 29, 2019

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Recordings of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *Sinfonietta*

represent major milestones in Simon Rattle's early discography: the latter with the Philharmonia as far back as 1983, the former with the forces of the Royal Opera House in 1990 (recorded by EMI but now part of Chandos's Opera in English series).

In a brief note accompanying this new release, the conductor explains his personal link to Janáček's wide-eyed and wondrous operatic masterpiece. It's the work that first made him want to conduct opera at all, and one of few pieces that reliably reduces him to tears. This recording was made when Rattle performed the work in Peter Sellars's semi-staging – a transfer from Berlin, where it was unveiled at the Philharmonie in 2017 – at the Barbican. And in his note, Rattle also explains their decision to stick here with the original Czech, to preserve the 'rhythms of the language' that are so central to the music.

I wasn't too enamoured of Sellars's gritty, urban vision of the work when I saw it in Berlin but it seems both

there and in London to have informed Rattle's vision of the score. With pinpoint playing from the LSO and close, detailed recorded sound, this is a *Vixen* with sharp teeth as well as sharp ears. Instead of the inviting, dewy soundscapes conjured up by, say, Mackerras's Vienna Philharmonic, we have something a little more threatening. It's a performance compelling in its urgency and vividness, hiding none of the uncanny moments of the score but still breaking out into climaxes of great tenderness, sensual power and beauty – listen to the wonderful second interlude, here with irresistibly soaring strings, swelling woodwind and exultant brass.

The sense of dramatic vividness is conveyed superbly by the cast, led by Lucy Crowe's impulsive Vixen, brimming with *joie de vivre* and mischief and singing with airy ease. Gerald Finley's Forester is outstanding, too, presenting a moving mixture of wisdom and resignation – and we only have a couple of audible traces of Sellars's concept of the role as rather unappealingly depressive.

Sophia Burgos is a vibrantly sung, ardent Fox, and the smaller roles, distributed among the rest of the cast, are all well taken, with Jan Martiník's world-weary Parson and Hanno Müller-Brachmann's Harašta especially fine. There are charming performances from the younger members of the cast, and the choruses are excellent, even if they sound a little rushed as the Voices of the Forest at the end of Act 2. Some evidence of the semi-staging remains in the recording but the engineering, though close, is good.

The generous coupling is every bit as compelling: a taut account of the *Sinfonietta* that bristles with nervous energy and exultant joy. As with the *Vixen*, it's a performance that also fully articulates the work's more unsettling side, and, while there are similarities with Rattle's earlier account, the playing from the LSO is on a different level: superbly incisive and standing up to the close scrutiny of the recorded sound. All

in all, an outstanding release, and a rewarding celebration of this wonderful composer's art. **Hugo Shirley**

The Cunning Little Vixen – selected comparisons:

Mackerras (5/82^R, 11/86^R) (DECC) 475 8670DOR2

Rattle, r1990 (3/92^R, A/03) (CHAN) CHAN3101

Sinfonietta – selected comparison:

Philh Orch, *Rattle*, r1983

(10/83^R, 3/85^R) (EMI/WARN) 433289-2

Lully

Armide (rev Louis-Joseph Francoeur, 1778)

Véronique Gens *sop* Armide

Reinoud Van Mechelen *ten* Renaud

Tassis Christoyannis *bar* Hidraot/Hate

Chantal Santon Jeffery *sop* Phénice/Lucinde

Katherine Watson *sop* Sidonie/Naiad

Philippe-Nicolas Martin *bar*
 Aronte/Artémidore/Ubalde

Zachary Wilder *ten* Danish Knight

Le Concert Spirituel / Hervé Niquet

Alpha ② ALPHA973 (137' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Armide was the last of Lully's collaborations with the librettist Philippe Quinault. It was staged at the Paris Opéra in 1686

and, like several of Lully's other operas, it was revived from time to time over the next hundred years. Despite various alterations and cuts the original edifice, so to speak, remained standing. But a new setting of Quinault's libretto for *Thésée* by Mondonville, put on at the Opéra in 1767, provoked outrage. So Gluck must have been trailing his coat when his version of Quinault's *Armide* was premiered at the Opéra in September 1777.

As it happened, Gluck's opera soon gained acceptance. But the initial hostility from the public piqued the interest of Anne-Pierre-Jacques Devismes du Valgay, who was appointed director of the Opéra some six months later. Devismes proposed to revive Lully's *Armide* for comparison, updated to suit contemporary taste: he therefore commissioned a revision from



Compelling urgency: Simon Rattle conducts a semi-staged performance of Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen* at the Barbican in London

Louis-Joseph Francœur, *maître de musique* of the Opéra orchestra. (Louis-Joseph's uncle, François Francœur, had done a similar job back in 1761.) And that, till now, was the end of the story, for Louis-Joseph's adaptation was never performed. It is thanks to the scholarly efforts of Julien Dubruque and Benoît Dratwicky, the indefatigable artistic director of the Centre de Musique Baroque de Versailles, that a performing version came to be made from the manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

The article by Dratwicky in the hardback enclosing the CDs, and a random comparison with the original opera recently recorded by Christophe Rousset (Aparté, 7/17), shows where the differences lie. The prologue is omitted, as in the Gluck. Lully's voice parts are intact, more or less, where they haven't been replaced; but out goes the harpsichord continuo, so all the recitatives are accompanied by the strings, who often indulge in new arpeggio and scale figures. The orchestra is expanded to include full double woodwind, horns and trumpets. There are several new instrumental pieces, starting with a new overture in the classical style that contrasts

strings and woodwind after a pedal point beginning; a Chaconne is inserted into Act 1 – the trumpets not always quite in tune – and there's a new Passacaille in Act 5 to replace the original, for which Lully was justly celebrated. That was perhaps the nearest that Francœur came to committing *lèse-majesté*. Not surprisingly, his reworking sounds quite like Gluck in places: certainly the Naiad and 'the demons changed into nymphs' (disc 1, tracks 22-23) sound as if they have just come from a pleasant afternoon with Eurydice and her friends in the Elysian Fields.

The story, from Tasso's epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata*, has attracted dozens of composers from Monteverdi to Dvořák. Armide, a Saracen sorceress trying to resist her love for the crusader Renaud, is a splendid vehicle for Véronique Gens. Having given us an *amuse-bouche* in the first of her 'Tragédiennes' recitals (Virgin/Erato, 8/06), she now seizes the opportunity of portraying the character in the round. If she doesn't quite match the venom of Marie-Adeline Henry at 'Que je le hais' – 'How I hate him' – on the Rousset recording, she makes up for it later at 'Que ... je le haisse' ('Let me hate him').

That comes at the end of Armide's famous monologue 'Enfin, il est en ma puissance'. Gens is in glorious voice, as she is in the new air that opens Act 3, with its woodwind solos and Bachian arpeggios. Reinoud Van Mechelen is ideal as his namesake, mellifluous and attentive to the text. The other singers, familiar specialists in this repertoire, are excellent, Tassis Christoyannis especially robust in the extended scene for Hate. Le Concert Spirituel and Hervé Niquet are in fine form, and the recording from the Arsenal concert hall in Metz is warm and clear.

Richard Lawrence

Massenet

Don César de Bazan (1888 version)

Laurent Naouri *bar* Don César de Bazan

Elsa Dreisig *sop* Maritana

Marion Lebègue *mez* Lazarille

Thomas Bettinger *ten* King Charles II of Spain

Christian Helmer *bar* Don José de Santarém

Christian Mounougou *bar* ... Captain of the Guard

Ensemble Aedes; Orchestre des Frivolités

Parisiennes / Mathieu Romano

Naxos ® ② 8 660464/5 (112' • DDD)

Includes synopsis; French libretto available from naxos.com



A word first about presentation. *Don César de Bazan* was staged in 2016 by Les Frivolités Parisiennes. This is a studio recording from last year which dispenses with all the spoken dialogue apart from the *mélodrame* (speech over music) – and some of that is cut too. The synopsis in the booklet manages to be extensive without being comprehensive; the printed libretto, which is available online but only in French, includes the dialogue and the text of musical numbers that have been omitted. Here is an unfamiliar opera that really needs the full Palazzetto Bru Zane treatment, with background articles, contemporary accounts and a translation of the libretto. On the other hand, this set is half the price of the Bru Zane productions; credit is due to Naxos for its enterprise.

Don César was first performed at the Opéra-Comique in 1872. Some of the cast were to appear in *Carmen* three years later: Jacques Bouhy (Don César/Escamillo), Célestine Galli-Marié (Lazarille/Carmen) and Paul Lhérie (King Charles II/Don José). The score and parts were lost when the theatre burnt down in 1887, and Massenet reorchestrated the opera from the vocal score for a production in Geneva the following year. It must have surprised anyone in the audience who had seen the operas that Massenet had composed in the interim: they might have recognised an anticipation of *Manon* (1884), but in its mixture of comedy and seriousness, not to mention its Spanish colouring, *Don César* is more like *Carmen* than anything else. Bizet must have seen it, back in 1872.

The story, roughly the same as Vincent Wallace's *Maritana* (London, 1845), is loosely based on Victor Hugo's play *Ruy Blas*. The villain of the piece is Don José, whose designs on the queen will have a chance of success only if her husband proves unfaithful. The king is obsessed with Maritana, who as a street-singer is too low-born to be his mistress. Don José persuades Don César to marry Maritana immediately before his execution for duelling, thereby raising her to an appropriate rank. But although the marriage takes place, the execution is frustrated by the boy Lazarille, on whose behalf Don César had fought the duel. Naturally, bride and groom fall in love. After further complications – yes, really! – Don César saves the king's honour by killing Don José offstage: his reward is

to be appointed governor of Granada, and of course he keeps the girl.

It's not much of a drama without the dialogue. There's a side to Don César – humorous, even witty – that is only apparent when he is speaking rather than singing. But the music is certainly appealing. The first act alone includes a *ballade aragonaise* for Maritana, a beautiful prayer for the chorus, 'À l'aube de cette journée', an ardent *mélodie* for the king and a swaggering air for Don César. There's a lovely berceuse that Lazarille sings to the sleeping, imprisoned César and some effective ensembles, including a patter duet for Don César and Don José. Two of the entr'actes recall music previously heard, such as the gavotte in the Act 1 finale.

It's all very well done by Les Frivolités Parisiennes. The best-known singer is Laurent Naouri, who brings a wealth of experience to the title-role. Don José doesn't get a solo number but Christian Helmer more than holds his own in the duet with Don César. As King Charles II, Thomas Bettinger sings his Act 3 *cavatine* so winningly that it's a shame he's deprived of his further avowal of love in Act 4. The women are even better. Elsa Dreisig expresses Maritana's loneliness and yearning in a beautifully phrased Romance, 'Je sais qu'il est une âme'; the boy Lazarille is sung by Marion Lebègue, whose rich mezzo, after a tender lullaby and a supplicatory Romance, is a perfect match for Dreisig's soprano in the *duo nocturne*. Massenet's scoring gives special opportunities to the cor anglais, clarinet and horn. Mathieu Romano is the conductor of this lively performance, which at bargain price is certainly worth investigation and, indeed, investment.

Richard Lawrence

Mazzoli

Proving Up

Michael Slattery *ten* Miles Zegner
John Moore *bar* Mr Johannes 'Pa' Zegner
Talise Trevigne *sop* Mrs Johannes 'Ma' Zegner
Abigail Nims *mez* Taller Zegner Daughter
Cree Carrico *sop* Littler Zegner Daughter
Andrew Harris *bass* Sodbuster

Opera Omaha; International Contemporary Ensemble / Christopher Rountree

Pentatone © PTC5186 754 (80' • DDD)

Includes libretto



Missy Mazzoli's *Proving Up* is one of the most successful and striking of a new

generation of American operas. It is a chamber score, set in the Western states of the 1860s. It touches upon primal American dreams and anxieties, from the collective ambition of Manifest Destiny to private fears of family life, social status and day-to-day survival in a harsh and unforgiving landscape. It premiered in Washington DC (and sounds much more effective in this excellent recording than I remember from its first outing, which I saw in 2018), and has been staged at Opera Omaha (a production that forms the basis of this recording) and in New York City at the Miller Theatre.

American opera is in a sustained period of 'prima le parole', focused less on pushing musical boundaries and more on creating effective theatre, with clear text-setting and themes that resonant with contemporary audiences. That has led to more than a few stolid, earnest and musically inert works, in which the orchestra functions like a dithering continuo ensemble adding commentary to anodyne and well-intentioned political theatre. Mazzoli's work rises far above that, with a surreal and sometimes gothic storyline (fashioned by librettist Royce Vavrek after a short story by Karen Russell) that opens up musical possibilities. Among them is a haunting prologue sung by the father figure, dubbed here 'Pa', and sung with great force and vocal warmth by baritone John Moore.

Pa's prologue sets the stage: 'Uncle Sam is rich enough to give us all a farm', he sings, a reference to the Homestead Act of 1862, which gave land to settlers willing to work it and improve it – hence the opera's title. Through those efforts they would eventually receive title to it, and the desperate need to be favourably appraised by the government inspector is the core tension of the work. Although the opera dates from 2018 and the short story that inspired it from 2013, the subject matter flays the myth off the bones of an American narrative that is now at the core of the country's moral awakening. This land was never empty, and its reapportionment to a mostly white, European-derived settler class is among the essential and original sins of American identity.

Mazzoli's score is rich in percussion, touches on folk fiddle tunes and includes a small complement of winds and a trumpet, along with piano, harpsichord and harp. But the dominant texture is one of smooth, sustained, tremulous sounds, which underscore the eeriness of a story that includes the ghosts of dead children and a mysterious figure, called the

Sodbuster, who functions as a figure of both death and judgement. Christopher Rountree conducts the International Contemporary Ensemble and a cast that includes a harrowing performance by tenor Michael Slattery as the young son of a troubled pioneer family, Andrew Harris as the Sodbuster and Talise Trevigne as the mother of the doomed clan.

In 2018 the Metropolitan Opera announced that it had commissioned a new mainstage opera from Mazzoli. This score, and this fine recording, should whet appetites more broadly for that debut, which is highly anticipated by those who already know her work. **Philip Kennicott**

Mozart

'Magic Mozart'

Bastien und Bastienne – Diggi, daggi, schurry, murry^a. **Così fan tutte** – Soave sia il vento^b. **Don Giovanni** – Deh! vieni alla finestra^a; Fin ch'han dal vino^a. **Die Entführung aus dem Serail** – Overture; Vivat Bacchus! Bacchus lebel^c. **La finta semplice** – Cospetton, cospettonaccio^c. **Le nozze di Figaro** – Overture; Dove sono i bei momenti^d; L'ho perduta, me meschina^e; Non so più cosa son, cosa faccio^e; Porgi amor, qualche ristoro^d; Voi che sapete che cosa è amor^e. **Der Stein der Weisen** – Nun, liebes Weibchen, ziehst mit mir, K625^f. **Die Zauberflöte** – Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön^g; Ha, hab ich euch noch erwischt!^h; Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzenⁱ; Pa-pa-pa-pa-Papagenoⁱ; Schnelle Füße, rascher Mutⁱ; Der Vogelfänger bin ich ja^a; Wie stark ist nicht dein Zauberton^g. Galimathias musicum, K32 – No 15, Adagio. Musik zu einer Pantomime, K446 – excs. Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio!, K418ⁱ

ⁱJodie Devos, ^{bdi}Sandrine Piau *sops*

^{bef}Lea Desandre *mez* ^{ch}Loïc Félix, ^aStanislas de Barbeyrac *tens* ^{abcfj}Florian Sempey *bar*

Insula Orchestra / Laurence Equilbey

Erato © 9029 52619-7 (71' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



Dubbed 'a magical cabaret' by conductor Laurence Equilbey, this is the album of a theatrical performance that, poignantly, was due to open in Paris in June. The concept – exploring various forms of magic through Mozart's operas – may work brilliantly when (we hope) it eventually appears on stage. As a CD programme it has a random, bitty feel that left me simultaneously wanting more and less. The one logical sequence of numbers here, from Act 1 of *Die Zauberflöte*, is broken by an archaic Ricercar from Mozart's prepubescent potpourri *Galimathias musicum*. Solos from *Figaro* are arbitrarily shuffled, with Cherubino's arias, in reverse order, split by the Countess's 'Porgi amor', and 'Dove sono' tacked on after Barbarina's plaintive 'pin' song – a solo that never works well out of context. Don Giovanni's two arias also come the wrong way round. Scattered into the mix are, inter alia, slivers from a fragmentary Pantomime (music for a masked ball in which Mozart played Harlequin), a comic 'cat' duet (orchestrated but not composed by Mozart) from the collaborative opera *Der Stein der Weisen*, and Colas's nonsense incantation from Mozart's childhood Singspiel *Bastien und Bastienne*.

If you can cope with this apparent arbitrariness, there is some classy singing on offer, finely supported by Equilbey's lively period band. Sandrine Piau's sensuous, silvery Countess – fiery, too, in the *Allegro* of 'Dove sono' – makes one want to hear her in the complete role. Ditto Lea Desandre's glowingly urgent Cherubino and Florian Sempey's Don Giovanni, seductive in the Serenade, oozing high-testosterone bravado in the Champagne aria. And how many

high baritones could sound as rotundly *basso* as Sempey in the *Entführung* drinking duet? Coloratura Jodie Devos duly delivers as Queen of the Night and communes tenderly with oboe in the 'insertion' aria *Vorrei spiegarvi* – a lovely performance. Both tenors, too, are excellent. For the moment (almost) all was forgiven in a hushed, dreamlike 'Soave sia il vento' from *Così*, the three singers perfectly balanced. But then a wind machine broke the spell. Why? **Richard Wignmore**

Puccini

Il tabarro

Franco Vassallo *bar* Michele
María José Siri *sop* Giorgetta
Angelo Villari *ten* Luigi
Antonio Garés *ten* Tinca
Eugenio Di Lieto *bass* Talpa
Anna Maria Chiuri *mez* Frugola
Chorus and Orchestra of the Maggio Musicale, Florence / Valerio Galli

Stage director **Denis Krief**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Dynamic © DVD 37872; © Blu-ray Disc 57872

(54' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, November 20 & 23, 2019

Includes synopsis



Now that *Suor Angelica* has reclaimed a place in audience hearts, *Il tabarro* is cast as the underrated third of *Il trittico*. Perhaps the drama is too Grand Guignol for modern sensibilities but I would argue it's Puccini's most convincing slice of *verismo*, a sweaty little one-acter about barge owner Michele, who discovers his wife, Giorgetta, is having an affair with stevedore Luigi, and wreaks a terrible revenge.

The Maggio Musicale Fiorentino is in a huge state of upheaval. Former music

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director Fabio Luisi, who took up the reins in 2018 with the goal of competing with La Scala, resigned last year in protest at political appointments made by the governing board. Productions are mounted on a shoestring, with Verdi's *Rigoletto*, *Trovatore* and *Traviata* using the same sets, for example. Understandably, Denis Krief deployed the same strategy for his *Trittico* last November, but it will take more than prudent financing to restore the company's fortunes.

A picture postcard of the Seine acts as a backdrop. Michele's barge is represented by a long wooden platform littered with a few crates, with steps below deck for the stevedores to emerge with sacks of cargo. There's little space for the song-seller to peddle his wares to the passing girls, who all trundle off in exactly the same direction as they entered. It's not just that it looks budget, but it lacks the sense of claustrophobia and grime essential for the opera to work effectively. After Michele murders Luigi – a completely tame bit of direction here – the lighting (also by Krief) drops far too suddenly as Giorgetta comes out on deck.

Musically, things are much stronger. The singers give good, honest performances, even if their acting can be stilted, and Valerio Galli gets persuasive results from the Maggio orchestra. Franco Vassallo is a solid, brooding Michele, 'Nulla! Silenzio!' – Puccini's best baritone aria – dispatched with passion and a fiery top G. María José Siri's dark *spinto* makes her perfect for Puccini's soprano roles (I saw her fine Cio-Cio-San at La Scala), and, apart from an occasional squally moment, she's an intense Giorgetta. Best of all is Angelo Villari as Luigi, whose steely tenor gleams with testosterone.

At just 50 minutes, this DVD/Blu-ray is exceedingly short measure. For just a few quid extra, you can purchase the entire *Trittico* in Richard Jones's outstanding Royal Opera production on Opus Arte. To rub salt into the wound, the *Gianni Schicchi* from this Maggio Musicale staging was released separately in August (another £20), and *Suor Angelica* followed in September (these will be reviewed in the next issue). That's £60 for a single evening's triple bill. Surely even Dante's old swindler Schicchi wouldn't be quite as audacious? **Mark Pullinger**

Saint-Saëns

Le timbre d'argent

Hélène Guilmette *sop*Hélène
Jodie Devos *sop* Rosa
Edgaras Montvidas *ten*Conrad
Yu Shao *ten*Bénédict

Tassis Christoyannis *bar* Spiridion
Jean-Yves Ravoux *ten*Patrick
Matthieu Chapuis *ten*Un Mendiant
Accentus; Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth
Bru Zane Ⓢ Ⓣ BZ1041 (153' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



'It's not an opera any more, it's a nightmare', Saint-Saëns wrote in 1880, when faced with a request for a potential sixth version

of *Le timbre d'argent* ('The Silver Bell') for a production in St Petersburg, which, as on so many occasions in the work's dreadful history, was eventually abandoned. Saint-Saëns's first opera, it was commissioned in 1864 as an *opéra comique* for Léon Carvalho's Théâtre Lyrique, then withdrawn during rehearsals due to lack of funds. It was subsequently rewritten with recitatives for the Opéra (which got cold feet), then again with dialogue for the Opéra-Comique (who backtracked when the Franco-Prussian war broke out) before eventually reaching the stage at the Théâtre de la Gaîté in Paris in 1877. There were umpteen more revisions before Saint-Saëns produced his final version for Brussels in 1914, which forms the basis for this wonderful recording, with the cast and forces of a 2017 revival at the Opéra-Comique.

The libretto is by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, who also provided Gounod with *Faust* and Offenbach with *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, and there are echoes in *Le timbre d'argent* of both. Saint-Saëns's protagonist is Conrad, a disaffected Austrian artist, suffering with a psychosomatic illness triggered by a conflict between love for his saintly fiancée Hélène and his obsessive desire for the ballerina-cum-courtesan Fiametta (played by a dancer), the subject of his latest painting. Pursuit of Fiametta requires money, however, and in order to acquire it, Conrad soon falls foul of the sinister doctor Spiridion, who gives him a magic bell, which fills his coffers each time Conrad rings it, but always does so at the price of the life of someone close to him. As the death toll mounts, Spiridion, like Lindorf in *Hoffmann*, also stalks him in multiple incarnations as a succession of potential rivals for Fiametta's attentions, until a closing redemptive twist reveals the whole narrative to be the product of Conrad's feverish imagination.

There are some dramaturgical wobbles and the score is uneven, though the best of it is magnificent. Carvalho's insistence on a

leading soprano role to counter Fiametta's silent presence results in Hélène acquiring a musical prominence that the narrative doesn't quite support. The third of the opera's four acts is predominantly pastoral and seems anticlimactic after the second, where the diablerie is marvellous and Spiridion, in his marquis guise, at his beguiling best. A handful of Wagnerisms are sprinkled in among the Gallic elegance and wit of the rest of it: *Tannhäuser* was clearly on Saint-Saëns's mind, and some of Fiametta's music has strayed from the Venusberg.

The recording itself is tremendous, conducted with infectious energy by François-Xavier Roth, and with Les Siècles really relishing every shift of colour in Saint-Saëns's gorgeous orchestral palette. Edgaras Montvidas is a fine, empathetic Conrad, his dark tone and passionate delivery nicely contrasted with Yu Shao's greater refinement as the solicitous Bénédict. Hélène Guilmette does lovely things as Hélène – her Act 2 aria is particularly exquisite – while Jodie Devos, with her silvery tone, makes much of little in the ungrateful role of Rosa, Hélène's sister and Bénédict's fiancée. The great performance, though, comes from Tassis Christoyannis as Spiridion, beautifully voiced, seductive yet witty in his various disguises, attractive and sinister throughout. There's fine choral singing from Accentus, while the recording itself, the occasional moment of woodwind key clatter apart, is ideally spacious. It's immensely enjoyable, and one of Bru Zane's finest achievements to date.

Tim Ashley

Vinci

Gismondo re di Polonia

Max Emanuel Cencic *counterten* Gismondo
Yuriy Mynenko *counterten* Otone
Sophie Junker *sop* Cunegonda
Aleksandra Kubas-Kruk *sop*Primislao
Jake Arditti *counterten*Ernesto
Dilyara Idrisova *sop*Giuditta
Nicholas Tamagna *counterten*Ermano
{oh!} Orkiestra Historyczna / Martyna Pastuszka,
Marcin Świątkiewicz *hpd*

Parnassus Arts Ⓢ Ⓣ 912010 487001 (3h 38' • DDD)
Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



Gismondo re di Polonia (Rome, 1727) depicts an entirely fictitious

title-hero's multiple acts of clemency towards the rebellious Lithuanian duke Primislao. The libretto was dedicated to



Il trittico in instalments: Angelo Villari (Luigi) and Maria José Siri (Giorgetta) star in a Florentine production of Puccini's *Il tabarro*

James III of Great Britain; the Old Pretender lived close to the theatre and was married to a Polish princess. This recording inaugurates the new label Parnassus Arts – Max Emanuel Cencic's production company that has already spearheaded pioneering recordings of Vinci's *Artaserse* (Virgin/Erato, 1/13) and *Catone in Utica* (Decca, 7/15) with all-male casts featuring assorted countertenors playing female characters. This time around experimental casting has been shelved: alongside four countertenors, there are three female sopranos.

Co-directed by the violinist Martyna Pastuszka and harpsichordist Marcin Świątkiewicz, the Polish band {oh!} Orkestra Historyczna crackles with vigorous theatricality. The Sinfonia bursts with full-throttle energy and tension – and this is how arias are played too, although there is sophistication and subtlety when required. Recitatives have fulsome continuo realisations that roll and thrust extrovertly.

Aleksandra Kubas-Kruk's stratospheric embellishments and shooting up an octave at cadences are displayed in Primislao's implacably tempestuous 'Nave altera, ch'in

mezzo all'onde', and a call to arms with a pair of trumpets and oboes ('Vendetta, o ciel, vendetta') has swaggering bellicosity. Gismondo's daughter Giuditta has a secret crush on her father's enemy; her arias are sung with sparkling personality and dizzying embellishments by Dilyara Idrisova. Cencic's *cantabile* phrasing is to the fore in Gismondo's 'Sta l'alma pensosa', and the bustling heroic showpiece 'Torna cinto il crin d'alloro' packs a visceral punch. Ernesto's outrage when diplomacy fails ('Tutto sdegno è questo core') matches bustling strings, rushing bassoon and punctuating horns with Jake Arditti's lively coloratura, whereas his evocation of hopeless love ('D'adorarvi così') has honeyed sweetness (the top 'violini' stave played solo by Pastuszka). Nicholas Tamagna has very little to do as the vengeful schemer Ermano, but does it well.

The adversities of star-crossed lovers Otone (Gismondo's son) and Cunegonda (Primislao's daughter) inspire Vinci's most memorable scenes. Sophie Junker's range of dramatic expression is demonstrated in Cunegonda's heartbroken assumption that Otone has been

treacherous towards her father (the F minor lament 'Tu mi tradisti, ingrato', with bassoon and four-part strings, marked *senza cembalo*), the uttering of a vicious curse on her father's enemies sworn in front of a statue of Otone (a violent *ombra* accompanied recitative 'Eterno, memorabile'), her crazed grief upon believing her father has been slain in battle (the accompanied recitative 'Misera! Ah sì, ti veggo'), and venomous hysteria hissed towards the innocent Otone in the tumultuous D minor rage aria 'Ama chi t'odia, ingrato'. Otone's pastoral 'Quell'usignolo' is sung by Yuriy Mynenko with sensitive delicacy, while a pair of sopranino recorders imitate a nightingale over almost imperceptible long horn notes (Świątkiewicz's extemporised harpsichord soloing is a touch busy), and an F major lament featuring two bassoons ('Vuoi ch'io mora?') is performed sublimely; Mynenko's bolder virtuoso side is unleashed in the valorous 'Assalirò quel core' (featuring flamboyant horns). The emotional core of Acts 2 and 3 reconfirm Vinci as the foremost Italian musical dramatist of his generation.

David Vickers

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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

Django Bates & Norbotten Big Band

Tenacity

Lost Marble LM0009



The seven-year journey of this music from recording to release chimes well with the title, though *Tenacity* could also be a soundtrack

to the era of pandemics and lockdowns. Everybody has to hold tight in tryin' times. In any case, there is a joy, if not exuberance, in this meeting between the trio led by British pianist Django Bates and Sweden's Norbotten big band that could also be a welcome antidote to many a trouble. Charlie Parker's music is given a thoughtfully adventurous new lease of orchestral life that amounts to something other than orchestral bebop, particularly on 'Donna Lee' where the theme is skillfully spread over a tempo

that is more relaxed than Bird's high-flying moments. The Bates original, 'The Study Of Touch', with its wistful wordless vocal, is a wise inclusion, inadvertently making us think about the central issues of proximity, intimacy and empathy, which could not be more relevant to an age in which isolation and social distancing have become part of whatever a 'new normal' may be.

Kevin Le Gendre

Diana Krall

This Dream Of You

Verve



Fans of Diana Krall's most recent solo album, her 2017 release *Turn Up the Quiet*, will be delighted to hear that the five-time

Grammy-winning jazz pianist and vocalist has returned to these sessions – the final

recordings she made with her great friend, mentor and long-time producer, Tommy LiPuma – to mine material for this equally impressive follow-up. Enveloped by a gorgeous, understated string arrangement courtesy of the talismanic Alan Broadbent, there's a special poignancy to the album's lead-off song, 'But Beautiful' as it was the last song that Krall and LiPuma completed together before the latter's death, aged 80, in March 2017. Broadbent also provides the string orchestration for another standout, 'Autumn In New York' – featuring guitarist Russell Malone and bassist Christian McBride – and provides the most simpatico piano accompaniment on two stripped back piano-vocal duets, 'More Than You Know' and 'Don't Smoke In Bed'. Krall's great gift of melancholy and emotional sincerity are heard to especially moving effect on the album's title track, Bob Dylan's song of lost love, 'This Dream Of You'. **Peter Quinn**

World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

Dr L Subramaniam & Roby Lakatos

Peacock

Avanti Classic AVA10562



The meeting of two virtuoso violinists from different genres is always interesting. Roby Lakatos is from a long dynasty of Hungarian Gypsy fiddlers and Subramaniam is probably the most famous violinist in the South Indian tradition. Both of them have been in many fusion projects over the years.

They open with 'Bullet Train', which alternates phrases from each of the two violinists getting faster and faster with rhythmic support from no less than Tanmoy Bose on tabla. It's a tour de force of super fast violin playing throwing phrases back and forth. There's a superb pizzicato section in the middle.

'Lamenting', by contrast, features slow, ethereal violin harmonics over Hungarian cimbalom. 'Hungarian Dance' is a version of Brahms's ever popular Hungarian Dance No 5, a staple of the Hungarian Gypsy repertoire. It's polished and includes great cimbalom from Jenő Lisztes. This album is a great meeting of two musicians who clearly connect to make thrilling music.

Simon Broughton

Kuljit Bhamra

Essence of Raga Tala

ARC Music EUCD2920



Here tabla maestro Kuljit Bhamra has put together a rather eclectic but very enjoyable selection of tracks, many which he has written himself, to give us a broad selection of ragas. Although the disc runs to a

generous 78 minutes, each track is relatively short and so the differences between each of the ragas can easily be heard, something I thought was a nice touch.

The star of the show is the 'multi-tabla set,' which he created to enable the playing of all the notes of a raga. This turns out to be no mere novelty, but is hauntingly beautiful and heard to great advantage on 'Dhun in Raga Patdeep – Sitar & Tabla' and also on the two 'Tabla Modale' tracks. The other excellent musicians who contribute to the disc should also be given their due. Among others, the violinist Rohan Roy deserves particular praise for his rendition of 'Raga Mishra Nat Bahirav – Violin', a delicate solo performance that holds your attention all the way to the end, and I was also very impressed by guitarist Siddhart Singh on 'Dhun in Raga Vrindavani Sarang – Acoustic Guitar & Tabla'. **Maria Lord**

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REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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The first full-time Viennese quartet

Richard Bratby revisits the recorded legacy of the mighty Alban Berg Quartet

The Alban Berg Quartet disbanded in the summer of 2008, and for anyone who discovered recorded chamber music during the three decades between their first LP in 1974 and their final disc in 2004, that still seems hard to believe. The ABQ were the first major chamber ensemble to come of age in the digital era, setting standards of unprecedented virtuosity, assurance and style as they planted their flag firmly on the commanding heights of what we used to call the core Austro-German repertoire in a series of what – in the heady, library-building 1980s and '90s – it was very tempting to describe as benchmark recordings.

Well, that's how it felt, anyway: the aura of Viennese tradition and intellectual authority that surrounded the ABQ might have been forbidding if it hadn't also seemed so unarguable. Confronted with their complete discography, something of that old awe returns. The 21st century is bristling with superb string quartets, and if there's a common characteristic of groups as different as (say) the Heath Quartet, the Cuarteto Casals or Quatuor Zäide, it's a spirit of improvisation; of openness to the moment. But if there's one quality that emerges from the Alban Berg Quartet's 62 CDs and eight DVDs, it's certainty: an unshakable sense, from first note to last, that these players know precisely what they want to say and exactly how to say it.

Tastes change, of course, but this set still represents a phenomenal achievement. The ABQ went through several personnel changes over its 37-year existence, the most significant being the departure in 1981 of the founding viola player Hatto Beyerle and his replacement by Thomas Kakuska. Its sound was anchored throughout by the supple, caramel-sweet cello tone of Valentin Erben and the frequently breathtaking virtuosity of first violinist Günter Pichler, whose ability to find the precise centre of every note is one of this

set's enduring marvels. After an extended period of listening to the ABQ, you might find yourself having to make technical allowances for other quartets.

With these strengths, of course, come certain limitations. Jean-Michel Molkhou, in an authoritative booklet essay, explains how Pichler and his co-founders conceived the group as 'the first full-time Viennese quartet' – four players from a very particular place and tradition making a decision to live and work as an ensemble along the lines of the LaSalle and Amadeus Quartets (both are cited as inspirations). The musical world-view conveyed by this set is defined by that perspective. Mozart, Haydn, Schubert and Brahms are all represented, with two complete cycles (1976-78 and 1991-92) of the Brahms quartets and the 10 late Mozart quartets (1975-78 and 1987-90).

But with the exception of a single, brisk account of Schubert's Quartet D173, the ABQ didn't tend to venture far from the familiar. These are the repertoire choices of a generation whose horizons were bounded by those old volumes of selected 'Celebrated Quartets'. Haydn comes off worst: incredibly, the Alban Bergs only recorded Opp 76 and 77 complete, though a shapely, energised pairing of the *Rider* and the *Emperor* was one of their first releases in 1974, and – according to Pichler, in a preface to the booklet note – the fledgling group declined an offer to record a complete Haydn cycle around the same time.

Then there's their commitment to 20th-century music. Pichler, in the booklet, explains how the group had taken its name (with the endorsement of Berg's widow Helene) 'out of a sense of inner conviction', and the pairing of Berg's Quartet, Op 3, and the *Lyric Suite* on their very first disc has the immediacy and zeal of a manifesto – one reaffirmed with greater refinement in 1992. Discs of Webern and Stravinsky show that from the outset, they

were absolute masters of the full range of contemporary techniques and tone-colours, and could apply them as instinctively and as vividly as their portamento in Schubert or Brahms.

Quartets by Lutosławski and Rihm, as well as Berio's *Notturmo* (one of many works written for and premiered by the ABQ at the height of their prestige), receive performances of such atmosphere and musical intelligence that we can only regret that the group didn't record more 20th-century repertoire. One can understand their decision – taken out of respect for the Borodin Quartet – not to record any Shostakovich. (The ABQ's big-boned Ravel and Debussy is proof of what can happen when a particular playing style, however sincere, doesn't quite mesh with a specific compositional idiom.) Still, a blazing premiere recording of Schnittke's Fourth Quartet (dedicated to the group) hints at what we might have missed.

These players know precisely what they want to say and exactly how to say it

Pichler can't say why they never recorded any Schoenberg, and drab chunks of post-war Mitteleuropean modernism by Erich Urbanner and Roman Haubenstock-Ramati don't add up to much of a consolation prize. But when Viennese tradition intersects with modernists from Austria's historic hinterland, the ABQ can spring some fascinating surprises. Their Janaček and Bartók cycles are notable for the sheer richness of tone colour, even if they lack the last ounce of emotional rawness. You'd never mistake the ABQ for folk-fiddlers, but in an era when these works were still widely assumed to be abrasive, their sense of direction and red-blooded expressive beauty must have made many converts.



Some of the most glorious ensemble-playing ever recorded: a celebration of the Alban Berg Quartet's legacy

These readings are of a piece with the ABQ's Dvořák and Smetana – extrovert, warm-toned, all-singing, all-dancing – and from the same frequently sweet well as the ABQ's Schubert and Brahms, to say nothing of a delicious anthology of waltz arrangements by Lanner and the Strausses. This is lyrical, lovable music-making; and never more so than when the group is joined by a guest. Elisabeth Leonskaja steps brightly through an exuberant *Trout* Quintet; the quartet audibly relish the expansive breadth that Alfred Brendel brings to the chamber version of Mozart's Concerto K414, and blend their tone to match Sabine Meyer's clarinet in a moody and impassioned 1998 performance of Brahms's Quintet.

By this stage, they preferred to make their recordings live in concert – a decision that backfires in a pair of Brahms Sextets in which the three surviving members of the Amadeus Quartet take the lead: the only place in the entire discography where intonation and ensemble really wobble. To generalise, the ABQ's live recordings trade intimacy for directness. At the same time, there's an increasing clarity

about their approach, evident when you compare their earlier and later Mozart sequences, or their two recordings of the Schubert G major. The later accounts are more translucent and lighter on their feet. But they never feel anything less than assured: which brings us to what Molkhou calls 'the Beethoven epic', the two complete Beethoven cycles which emerge from this box as the ABQ's most significant recorded legacy.

The first, recorded in the studio between 1978 and 1983, straddles the departure of Beyerle and the arrival of Kakuska, who plays from Op 127 onwards. The second was recorded live in the Mozart-Saal in Vienna in June 1989 and was simultaneously filmed, with results that are included here on six DVDs. With pedestrian direction and an unprepossessing venue, I found the 1989 cycle more enjoyable on CD, which only increased the impression of an imposing, almost aggressively confident cycle delivered in the manner of a public oration. I found myself warming more consistently to the earlier cycle; which presents the Op 18 and Op 59 quartets with irresistible

verve, before making a feature rather than a bug out of the change in viola player. Kakuska's wide-grained, velvety tone adds a new depth to the ABQ's palette as they enter upon the final sequence: it's like hearing the quartet coming of age.

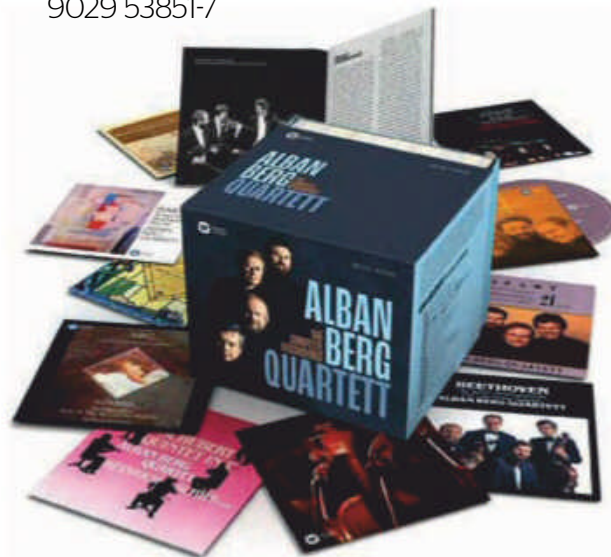
I'll admit, I didn't initially perceive the profundity I'd hoped for in the ABQ's lyrical, determinedly worldly 'Heiliger Dankgesang'; it's presented as a hymn to life, not to the hereafter (and even more tangibly so in the 1989 cycle). But there's an integrity to the playing that, on repeated listening, becomes even more affecting. No vibrato-free effect-making here: this is who the ABQ are, and this is how they express themselves. The intensity peaks in the Cavatina of Op 130: playing of deep, concentrated inwardness that finds the most natural possible release in a performance of the *Grosse Fuge* that, for lyricism, wit and unstoppable, euphoric momentum, might be the most purely musical interpretation of this work that I've ever heard. (In 1989 they play Op 130 with the 'official' finale.)

This earlier late-Beethoven sequence – the first on CD – won a *Gramophone* Award in 1985, when Robert Layton remarked that 'no one version of the late quartets can give us the complete truth'. I'm not sure how well, overall, this box serves the myth of the Alban Berg Quartet as the untouchable last word in the standard repertoire. What's beyond question is that it contains some of the most glorious ensemble-playing ever recorded. As a coda, watch the short DVD documentary by Bruno Monsaingeon in which they coach a youthful Artemis Quartet, and chat, slightly awkwardly, in a Viennese wine garden. It reaffirms the impression – audible throughout the set – of four exceptional musicians who cared profoundly about their art, and the bond that they shared. And in chamber music, there's no higher praise than that. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

The Complete Recordings Alban Berg Qt

Warner Classics © (62 CDs + ⑧ DVD)
9029 53851-7



Zubin Mehta in Los Angeles

Peter Quantrill enjoys new remasterings of the conductor's West-Coast decade

Turning an ear to Zubin Mehta's assorted Sony recordings (1/20), I held out hope that his legacy would be better served by Decca in due course. So it proves when the focus is more tightly trained on the conductor's music-directorship in Los Angeles. In 1962 Mehta began his tenure under a cloud – 'a dirty business', he later acknowledged, which had prompted the resignation of the previous music director designate, Georg Solti – but the label's experienced hands shrewdly waited another five years before scouting for local recording venues and setting up a bespoke sound stage at the hitherto unloved Royce Hall.

Building on the experience of the LAPO's émigré musicians and previous directors – Rodzinski, Klemperer, Wallenstein and van Beinum – Mehta nurtured ambitions to transform 'a good orchestra without much character' into a West Coast Vienna Philharmonic. The chosen repertoire, however, played to the strengths of both orchestra and conductor in late-Romantic, widescreen blockbusters. Turn to the winningly lurid clamour of their *1812*, *Boléro*, *Pictures at an Exhibition* or *Hunnenschlacht* and one understands why, to Mehta's dismay, critics often resorted to stereotype, taking cheap if well-aimed shots at chromium-plated sound and empty cocktail glasses.

In this regard the X-ray quality of 1970s Decca engineering is a mixed blessing. Stravinsky's *Rite* and *Petrushka* have rarely enjoyed such amplitude and transparency on record. Slower and rhythmically tighter modern versions of *Ionisation* by Boulez and Jansons pale beside the visceral impact and multi-miked immediacy of the LAPO percussionists. Royce Hall's Skinner organ is a definite but subtly integrated presence in Liszt, Saint-Saëns, Elgar, Holst and Richard Strauss. On the other hand, the LAPO strings are left perilously exposed at the climaxes of *La valse* and *Verklärte Nacht*. The dislocation at 0'57" in 'The Augurs of Spring' is one of several glaring edits, and you can hear the microphones cringing and the levels slammed down at 16'12" into *The Poem of Ecstasy*.

Some of the technical shortcomings, exacerbated by earlier digital transfers, have been substantially mitigated by Ben Wiseman's new remasterings. Though Mehta's readings were run in during the LAPO's concert season, practical and

financial constraints (involving 'prodigious' costs according to the producer John Culshaw) obliged Decca to organise the sessions within annual 10-day blocks. While a practised and efficient studio conductor, Mehta chafed against the contract which stipulated a return of four albums from each block ('It's against my principles to record that much'), including one of 'modern' music. Verdi's *Four Sacred Pieces* were recorded within a single three-hour session, with the chorusmaster Roger Wagner taking (uncredited) charge of the unaccompanied *Ave Maria*. A complete Tchaikovsky symphony cycle was set down within five days.

Mehta nurtured ambitions to create a West Coast Vienna Philharmonic

In the circumstances, the First Chamber Symphony of Schoenberg, Nos 8 and 9 of Dvořák and Nos 1-3 of Tchaikovsky enjoy playing of surprising spark and finesse. The Fourth was recorded twice a decade apart, and the 1967 version outside the cycle is much less *pesante* and more sharply characterised. Live-like adrenalin courses through the veins of Bruckner's Eighth and Ives's Second. The best of the 'modern' albums paired Copland's *Lincoln Portrait* (Gregory Peck a contained but not impassive narrator) with the politically 'hot' *Contextures*, a compelling response to LA's race riots from the orchestra's principal percussionist, William Kraft, writing atonally but with an undercurrent of Bartókian night-music menace.

By turn, however, there is some force to the old charge that Mehta conducted the orchestra more than the music, especially with the studio clock ticking. Fast and loud tends towards slapdash in the *Candide* Overture and Mahler's Fifth. Each section of *The Rite* speeds up with almost congenial regularity.

Slow and reflective soon become sluggish and dull in *Sheherazade* and *Appalachian Spring*. More pervasive, in contrast to the technical quality of the recordings, is their lack of rhythmic grip and definition on the one hand, and tender shaping of a phrase on the other, the platinum-selling *Star Wars* suite a case in point.

Handsomely illustrated and annotated, the box is like a land-map to the repertoire, Landranger- rather than Explorer-scale, drawn with a sure hand in vivid colour, where many of us yearn for a guiding hand on the scene. Its contour lines can be traced along Mehta's response to his beloved Strauss. His particular talent for conveying serenity was also an Achilles heel – the hero of *Ein Heldenleben* sits back and sounds pleased with himself much too early in the piece – and he drives unrelentingly through the sweet spots of *Symphonia domestica*. By contrast, the sumptuous detail of Zarathustra's descent is almost too lovingly described, and Mehta revels in the picaresque sweep of the treacherous Alpine climb while missing the bigger metaphysical picture.

Critics at the time complained of balance problems in *Don Quixote*, but there is a fine tradition of non-hero-cellist performances of the piece, begun by the composer's own 1941 recording. The struggle, the braggadocio, the violence and finally resignation: all are caught by Kurt Reher's grizzled yet vulnerable account of the solo part, recorded the year before he retired after three decades as the LAPO's principal cellist. As a piece he has returned to throughout his career, *Quixote* evidently means much to Mehta too, perhaps rather as *Ein Heldenleben* did to Karajan, and in his first recording he had already mastered the score's quintessentially Viennese sentiment and irony. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

Complete Decca Recordings LAPO / Mehta
Decca © (38 discs) 485 0374



BOX-SET *Round-up*

Rob Cowan reviews a quintet of releases focusing largely on the music of Beethoven

I was very pleased to see that Rubicon has gathered together the three separate volumes of Beethoven violin sonatas featuring the violinist **Chloë Hanslip**

and pianist **Danny Driver**, the first having been reviewed by Richard Bratby in November 2017 and the second by me in June 2018. Commenting on Vol 1, RB observed the duo's 'engaging and accomplished performances, leaning towards understatement'. For my own part, Hanslip's approach ranges from an expressive ebb and flow (with variegated vibrato) to assertiveness, though she never upstages Driver's authoritative piano-playing. The two consistently play into each other's hands and Vol 3 is crowned by an acutely observed account of the *Kreutzer* Sonata, which is as far from virtuoso histrionics as it is possible to imagine. Thoughtful, unhurried and with the important outer-movement repeats observed, it's a reading of virtually symphonic proportions. Like most attentive Beethovenians, Driver and Hanslip plumb the depths of the early works, Op 12 No 2's *Andante* for example, while the last sonata of all, Op 96, receives one of the finest performances in the set, the finale's variations in particular coming across as admirably spontaneous. As to the sound, I'd describe it as resembling the acoustic of a small recital hall.

Sound quality isn't exactly the most appealing aspect of Melodiya's musically welcome reissue of the **Beethoven Quartet's** 1969-72 complete cycle of string quartets by their namesake, though the playing itself is highly distinctive. Sergei Shirinsky's admirable cello-playing tends to evade proper focusing, balance-wise, even where it's most important (the *Harp* Quartet's furious Trio, for example); and much as I enjoy the overtly expressive, even Heifetzian violin-playing of the quartet's leader Dmitri Tsyganov, this time the recorded balance has him playing under your nose. Still, these are vital, often thrilling performances, the early quartets trim and assertive, the middle set full of robust humour, the late works notably warm-hearted, though Op 130's Cavatina is rather too swift and the chosen finale

is the *Allegro* rewrite rather than the *Grosse Fuge* original (which as it happens is also included).

If you fancy a cameo sampling of Ondine's controversial Beethoven piano concerto set with **Olli Mustonen**, try the attenuated pointillism that characterises Mustonen's initial entries in the Second Concerto's first and last movements. He and the Tapiola Sinfonietta opt for bounce, crispness and transparency, Mustonen a dab hand with detached notes, even at speed, as well as meaningful dynamic colouration. In the First Concerto he plays his own stylish cadenzas, while his direction of the expert chamber orchestra in his charge sees the solo line lightly and seamlessly supported. Although fearlessly individual, these performances are never so outlandish that the music's natural flavour evaporates. Clipped but potently musical (as in the carefully articulated underlining in the Third Concerto's first movement), lively but never excessively fast, Mustonen's imaginative readings nonetheless deliver bags of illuminating detail. The Third Concerto is perhaps the most compelling performance overall (the start of the *Emperor's* finale is a mite bullish), whereas the fitfully successful Violin Concerto turned Piano Concerto is worth a visit every once in a while. The recordings are superbly engineered.

Back in 2014 Melodiya issued **Rudolf Barshai's** absorbing set of Beethoven's Symphonies Nos 1-8 with the Moscow Chamber Orchestra (9/15). Still to come, I hope, is their Mozart symphony series, though the 'Rudolf Barshai Anniversary Edition' (Barshai died 10 years ago this year) does at least include a trim and elegant account of the Divertimento, K136, part of a disc also featuring other concert performances, Bach's Third *Brandenburg Concerto* and lively Stravinsky (*Dumbarton Oaks* and the Concerto in D). Some of this material has been reissued on CD before – Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante*

with David Oistrakh, for example, which receives a performance in a million. Among remaining highlights are Shostakovich's Third Quartet (led by Julian Sitkovetsky) and Barshai's own highly imaginative orchestrations of a sequence from Prokofiev's kaleidoscopic *Visions fugitives*, which sound to me remarkably similar to the recordings once put out by EMI, coupled with Tippett's Double Concerto (recorded during the same year, 1962). Additional excellent performances include another thought-provoking Barshai recreation, Bach's *The Art of Fugue* with the conductor's own 17-minute completion of the unfinished and ultimately magisterial *Fuga a 3 soggetti*, though I should also note a fascinating two-CD *Art of Fugue* set by the Salzburg Chamber Soloists (Aldilà Records ARCD009) that includes completions of that same fugue by Karl Hermann Pillney, Donald Francis Tovey and, most remarkable (and uplifting) of all, Kalevi Aho.

And lastly **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau**, the first volume of a 'Lied Edition' from Orfeo, mostly later recordings of little-known lieder by Zelter, Reichardt, Spohr and Pfitzner (variously accompanied and often beautifully sung), plus songs from Wolf's *Italian Songbook* with Irmgard Seefried recorded at the Salzburg Festival in 1958. Also included is the soprano Julia Varady – Fischer-Dieskau's wife from 1977 until the German baritone's death in 2012 – singing Spohr's Six Lieder, Op 103. **G**

THE RECORDINGS

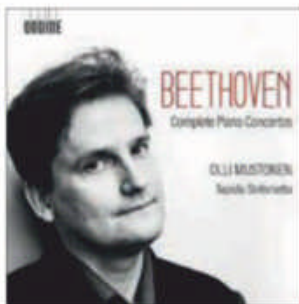
Beethoven Violin Sonatas **Hanslip, Driver**
Rubicon (M) (3) RCDB1000

Beethoven String Quartets **Beethoven Qt**
Melodiya (M) (8) MELCD100 2587

Beethoven Piano Concertos
Tapiola Sinfonietta / Mustonen
Ondine (B) (3) ODE1359-2

Rudolf Barshai Anniversary Edition
Melodiya (M) (5) MELCD100 2600

Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau Lied Edition, Vol 1
Orfeo (F) (5) C992 205



REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



A further chapter of the Munch legacy

The conductor Charles Munch has in the recent past been handsomely served on the box-set front, what with Sony Classical's 'The Complete RCA Album Collection' (86 CDs, 12/16), 'Charles Munch: The Complete Recordings on Warner Classics' (13 CDs, 1/19) and now an admirable Decca Eloquence 'Legacy', 14 CDs this time, with DG/Polydor/Decca recordings that stretch from 1938 to 1967, the latter period represented by some Decca Phase Four recordings and Munch's final taping, an imposing account of Berlioz's Requiem with the tenor Peter Schreier and the Bavarian Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra. As to the stereophile Phase Four blockbusters, regarding *Gaîté parisienne* in January 1984 Ivan March noted that the effect of the sound 'is somewhat aggressive in its brilliance and lacking in charm, but there is plenty of vitality, even if the unrelenting brightness tends to tire the ear a little'. IM made similar observations in March 1990 for the CD transfer on Decca Weekend and listening again to what amounts to a relentless dose of antiphonal ear-bashing, his words ring true. Still, the performance is lively enough, though the close of the work, where the Barcarolle wafts back on a charming harp glissando after the *leggiere* section has died away, is cut – Munch's own doing, I presume. The *Carmen* and *L'Arlésienne* Suites and the *Fountains* and *Pines of Rome* are also good, though the warring forces treading the Appian way take time to steady themselves.

The best is yet to come, so I may as well mention the only disappointment, a synthetic-sounding *Symphonie fantastique* with the Hungarian Radio and Television Orchestra from 1966, passably if muddily played and no match for Munch's other versions of a piece that he had a real feeling for. In the first movement, at 7'35", things sound decidedly shaky, while the last two movements are often poorly focused. Better Berlioz dates from the 1940s, including overtures, animated scenes from *Roméo et Juliette* and *Les Troyens* (Royal Hunt and Storm). As for the remaining goodies, there are more than enough to justify purchasing

this well-planned and expertly transferred set. Tops for me are 1961 Vega recordings of the Aubert pupil Henry Barraud's Roussel-like Third Symphony (I'm thinking in particular of the *Adagio*) coupled with a riveting account of Roussel's own Second *Bacchus et Ariane* Suite, the closing *Energico* especially striking. Sound-wise we're talking clean, clearly polarised stereo, leaner but far more natural-sounding than the Phase Four productions. More Roussel, this time from the mono era, is equally impressive: the *Petite suite* with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra and, with the LPO, *Le festin de l'araignée* fragments and the Suite in F. Also with the LPO, a bracing account of Bizet's Symphony in C, the first movement as swift as any I've heard, as well as Fauré's *Pelléas et Mélisande* Suite and d'Indy's *Fervaal* Prelude.

There are more than enough goodies to justify purchasing this set

A Paris Conservatoire recording of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* has a sportive feel to it, the third movement's closing pages treated to a wide variety of tempos. Prokofiev's *Classical* Symphony is more consistent and there's Munch's Paris Ravel, the two *Daphnis et Chloé* Suites (a shame that for the ballet's first half you miss the rapt choral interlude) and the two piano concertos, the G major neatly played by Munch's niece Nicole Henriot-Schweitzer (each of the Munch boxes features a Henriot-Schweitzer Ravel G major), the Left Hand Concerto given a tautly driven account in 1938 with Jacqueline Blancard and the Paris Philharmonic Society Orchestra. *Boléro* is a fairly stately 16'54" (as opposed to 13'49" in Boston on Living Stereo); interesting too to have Widor's nicely built *Fantaisie* with the pianist Marcelle Herrenschildt, recorded in 1938 with the Philharmonic Society Orchestra.

The L'Oiseau-Lyre recordings gave me particular pleasure, Haydn's *Sinfonia concertante* featuring a superb violinist, Roland Charmy, husband of the celebrated

harpist Lily Laskine, with André Navarra playing the cello, Myrtle Morel the oboe and the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra. Mozart's *Adagio and Fugue* in C minor (Grand Symphony Orchestra) weighs in with no little impact, while a vital 1947 Conservatoire coupling of Beethoven's Eighth and Mendelssohn's Fifth Symphonies is especially memorable for the way, in Mendelssohn's finale, *Andante con moto* seamlessly morphs into *Allegro vivace*, often a very tricky transition to negotiate.

It's humbling to recall that the 28-year-old violinist Ossy Renardy, whose persuasively vibrant 1948 recording of the Brahms Concerto with Munch and the Concertgebouw makes such a big impression, would die in a car accident five years later. When you think that the similarly ill-fated Ginette Neveu made a Philharmonia recording of the same work two years earlier (under Issay Dobrowen) which garnered much critical praise, rightly in my view, it seems a shame that the equally effective Renardy and Munch option has been largely forgotten. As for the rest, Munch brings a dancing countenance to Debussy's 'Ibéria' and is admirably direct in Franck's D minor Symphony and Symphonic Variations (the latter with Eileen Joyce on top form). Recordings of Saint-Saëns's *Le rouet d'Omphale* and *Danse macabre* from the late 1940s, although well played, rather show their age, and Schumann's Fourth Symphony (LPO) keeps to the fast lane, as well it might having shed its outer movement repeats. Booklet-wise, Jean-Charles Hoffelé paints Munch in words as effectively as Munch himself paints the composers he conducts. This is a painstakingly researched set and a while I wouldn't call most of these recordings definitive, I've been more than happy to reacquaint myself with the ones I know and to discover the ones I don't know.

THE RECORDING



The Legacy of Charles Munch

Decca Eloquence
© 14 ELQ484 0219

Dinu Lipatti discoveries

There are various reasons why you should consider 'Dinu Lipatti: the complete Columbia recordings 1947-48' as a sound investment (literally), even if you already own one or more transfers of these (mostly) familiar recordings. APR's previous release of this material, which appeared in 1999 (APR5509), boasted transfers that were at once warmer but more detailed than those put out by EMI in their 1990 Lipatti box (which marked the passing of forty years since the pianist's death). For their original release APR had access to vinyl pressings which for this latest incarnation have been further enhanced. The net result is a new-found refinement that captures Lipatti's signature clarity of tone, bell-like in the manner of the pianist's teacher Alfred Cortot, and the sheer depth projected at the lower end of the spectrum, often reminiscent of Rachmaninov. Both aspects of his playing come across as never before, and while there's a residue of shellac surface noise (the Chopin Barcarolle and Ravel 'Alborada del gracioso' are completely new transfers taken from the original shellac pressings), the benefits of having Lipatti's piano closer and clearer to hand, though subtle, are cumulatively telling. As to the sonically more primitive extras, I'm reminded of Rachmaninov's duo recordings with Fritz Kreisler, Lipatti and his cellist partner Antonio Janigro quietly conversing on equal terms, the Bach-Siloti *Andante* (based on the slow movement of the A minor Solo Violin Sonata) especially beautiful. The first movement of Beethoven's A major Sonata brought to mind the classic Feuermann/Myra Hess recording, such is the duo's songful manner of phrasing. This is truly elevated music-making and the set comes with excellent notes by Mark Ainley.

THE RECORDING



The Complete Columbia Recordings 1947-48 Lipatti
APR (M) (2) APR6032

Schöne by nature

When it comes to recordings by the Austrian soprano Lotte Schöne, both the name and the legacy have until now been obscured by the mists of time. Marston's 'The Complete Lotte Schöne' shines a light where none has shone before, and may inspire you beyond measure. Schöne (1891-1977) cut numerous discs including



Extraordinarily moving: the soprano Lotte Schöne

a sequence that was to all intents and purposes heading for Walter Legge's Hugo Wolf Society albums except, given the potential German market and the politics of the day, that was impossible: Schöne was Jewish, so the same songs were remade by Ria Ginster. Happily we now have Schöne's recordings to hand, beautiful, vivacious performances, anonymously accompanied. As to the rest, acoustic recordings of mixed repertoire – opera, operetta, lieder, folk song – attest to a bright, sweet voice, agile, expressive and intelligently used.

While post-war private recordings undeniably report a voice in advanced maturity (a Berlin RIAS recital from 1950 shifts from acetate to tape), the pathos of Schöne's singing is extraordinarily moving. Take Schumann's 'Mondnacht', part of an extended sequence from Schumann's Op 39 *Liederkreis*, recorded in Paris in 1948, the way line-ends fade with a rapt diminuendo; then turn to an unpublished recording from 1926 (one of many included), and although the voice is younger and the manner of expression remains full of feeling, the interpretative subtlety simply isn't there.

As to the issued items of Schöne in her prime, try 'Ach, ich fühls' at the start of disc 4. Recordings of music from *Manon*, *Eine Nacht in Venedig* and *La bohème* are also wonderful, as well as a regrettably cut 'Der Hirt auf dem Felsen'. With first-rate transfers and highly informed notes by Michael Aspinall, who knew Schöne and outlines her career as well as her dignified

and lovely nature, this has to be one of the most engrossing vocal sets to arrive in recent years, not to be passed over lightly.

THE RECORDING



The Complete Lotte Schöne
Marston (F) (5) 55002-2
marstonrecords.com

Talich in wartime

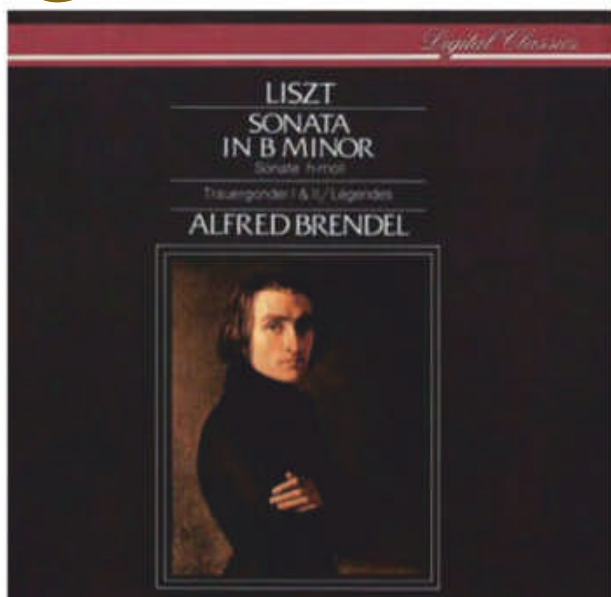
Back in November 2010 I welcomed an electrifying live performance of Smetana's *Má vlast* given in Prague by the Czech Philharmonic under Václav Talich on June 5, 1939, less than three months after the Nazis had occupied the city (Czech Philharmonic/Supraphon). It won a *Gramophone* Award and I had the privilege of sharing an Awards dinner table with Talich's delightful daughters. Little did I know then that there would be more to come, 'The Prophecy' from Act 3 of Smetana's *Libuše*, again recorded live under Talich, this time on May 29 with the Prague National Theatre Chorus and Orchestra, though the Prelude is taken from a shellac disc that Talich made with the Czech Philharmonic in 1940. But the opera fragments are what make this CD unique, especially the intense portrayal of *Libuše* herself by the then-young soprano Marie Podvalová, bold, fearless singing, almost always dead in tune like a knife in the heart. Other singers involved include the bass Vilém Zitek, who we're told hated making records, but what a voice. Once through a ceremonial procession comes *Libuše's* prophecy, the heroine proclaiming 'My dear Czech nation will survive, and gloriously, gloriously overcome the horrors of hell'. A prophecy realised only in part, tragically, but still the nation did survive, as it did the trials of Communism that challenged it soon afterwards. Sound quality is variable (the excellent booklet offers chapter and verse on the remastering process) and as with *Má vlast* the performance is tailed by thunderous applause, with the Czech national anthem proudly intoned by the audience. There are 'historic' (ie old) recordings, and historic recordings (recordings of history being made). This release is most definitely in the latter category. Snap it up before the deletion axe beats you to it.

THE RECORDING



Smetana Libuše Talich
Supraphon (F) SU4279-2

Classics RECONSIDERED



Harriet Smith and Tim Parry revisit Alfred Brendel's second (1981) recording of Liszt's Sonata in B minor and ruminates on its classic status



Liszt

Piano Sonata in B minor

Alfred Brendel *pf*

Philips

Claudio Arrau (Philips) and the late lamented Clifford Curzon (Decca) both recorded great interpretations of Liszt's Sonata. So did Horowitz, but his 1977 (RCA) version was put out of court by an incredible decision to split it over two sides. But here at last is a reading, from Brendel, that can be placed with Arrau's and Curzon's. All three are well served by their recordings, which is no small tribute to Decca, considering that their disc appeared nearly 20 years ago. Arrau does not so much reconcile peaceful and stormy passages as

demonstrate that they represent different aspects of the same thing; and the richness of his tone pervades every moment. It is not an older recording but a different attitude to piano sonority that gives Curzon a crisper, drier sound – in the leaping initial octaves of the *Allegro energico*, for example. Yet he is just as eloquent as Arrau, or Brendel: compare them in the lyrical passage (*dolce con grazia*) which follows Liszt's initial statement of his *Grandioso* theme. Perhaps it is more pointful to compare Brendel with himself. His previous recording of the Sonata is not currently obtainable, but Lisztians think highly of his early recordings of this composer, and the disc will be on many readers' shelves.

One of several particularly advantageous points at which to compare the new and old Brendel is the *recitativo* passage which leads into the *Andante sostenuto*. This shows how much more complex his interpretative aims, and achievements, now are. The wider tonal palette is not just a matter of digital recording; still less the greater range of nuances. Remarkable, too, is the underlying stillness of the *Andante sostenuto*: no wonder Brendel, in the essay which accompanies this LP, asserts that the work's true climax lies in this central section rather than in that frantic assertion of B major, with flailing octaves and hectically repeating chords, which precedes the introverted (and again *Andante sostenuto*) coda. **Max Harrison** (11/82)

Harriet Smith There's no doubt that among Alfred Brendel's many achievements, his championing of Liszt is among the most important in shaping the way we regard the composer today. I was struck to remember that in the first five years of the *Gramophone* Awards, Brendel won the instrumental category three times, on each occasion playing Liszt.

Tim Parry Yes, as someone who loves Liszt's music and thinks it is important, I've always liked knowing we have someone like Brendel in our corner. That said, it took me a while to come round to the actual playing. I think this might be because my first exposure to Brendel's Liszt came rather later (possibly when he played the *Années de pèlerinage* on BBC TV in Liszt's centenary year, 1986 – those were the days). Some years on, when I heard his earlier Liszt, I understood why people rated it so highly.

HS I can understand your initial hesitation about Brendel's Liszt. He certainly doesn't

reach out and grasp attention in the way that other – more, shall we say, showy – pianists do. For some listeners that's partly down to his actual sound, which is never self-indulgently beautiful per se but which actually channels your attention right into the heart of the music itself. On returning to his second recording of the Sonata in B minor, I find myself gripped anew by the power and potency of his playing. One of the most impressive things is the sense of portent he finds from the opening *sotto voce* bare octave Gs onwards. He gets the attack just right – and maintains the illusion of a sense of line through the rests. And he launches into the *Allegro energico* (bar 8) with a fearless conviction – he has talked of the sonata's 'blend of deliberation and white heat', and how viscerally he conveys these opposing qualities.

TP I completely agree. It's a long time since I last heard this recording, and I've really enjoyed returning to it. While certain other pianists bring a more thrilling excitement

to parts of this work, Brendel conveys a seriousness of intent without shying away from the essential virtuosity. There is a Beethovenian rigour and concentration to the playing that leaves a deep impression. One of the great assets, for me, is Brendel's magnificent sense of timing. The rests are crucial to the shape of the music and how it unfolds, not only at the beginning, and in Brendel's hands you are never in doubt that every note and every rest has a very specific purpose.

HS It's apt that you mention Beethovenian rigour, as Brendel has described the B minor Sonata as the 'most original, powerful and intelligent sonata composed after Beethoven and Schubert ... a work of absolute music, and it exemplifies total control of large form.' He makes us keenly aware of not only the work's antecedents but also its heroic, Romantic qualities.

TP I think Brendel brings out all of those things. This is a deeply intelligent and



Alfred Brendel's 1981 version is the second of his three studio recordings of Liszt's B minor Sonata

powerful account, tightly controlled and conveying the strong conviction that Liszt was the legitimate heir of the Beethovenian sonata. As you say, he certainly brings out the music's Romantic qualities, but there are times when I wonder whether he underplays a sense of fantasy. Compare his flourish at bar 204 (around 7'30" in this recording) with that of Martha Argerich, who really observes the *accelerando* and *molto crescendo* indications. And then in the increasing intensity from bar 205, in the build-up to the crashing chords at bar 297, although there is a sense of struggle that you might say is appropriate, you get an altogether different level of epic sweep and dramatic force from Krystian Zimerman.

HS I know exactly what you mean about that passage from bar 204 – it's relatively sedate certainly when you compare it with someone such as Argerich. But you could argue that she's too much about fantasy and impetuosity and in places underplays the work's grandeur. And certainly Brendel's approach has its followers, not least Paul Lewis, whose performance I also much admire. And if you overplay that part it can become merely hysterical, perhaps exciting in the moment (and heard live in the concert hall – oh to have that opportunity again!), but ultimately less satisfying. I prefer Brendel's second recording to his third account from 1991, where those

chords seem to have become altogether harsher-sounding – more brittle. But going back to the second version, I wonder what you make of the start of the *Andante sostenuto* (at 12'21"): effectively inward? Or a touch too ponderous? Ironically, here I slightly prefer his later account, which seems to have a simpler quiet rhetoric to it.

TP I agree that Argerich's recording is a thrilling one-off, but too helter-skelter for repeated listening. In the *Andante sostenuto*, my concern is whether Brendel has the tonal allure to sustain his expressively inflected, rather slow approach at the start – one person's inward is another's ponderous, and I suspect this might depend on what mood you're in. There is a greater simplicity here, as you say, in the 1991 remake, but more importantly (for me), I prefer the build-up of intensity that follows (from around 14'28" to 16'00") in the 1981 recording: I find the tonal heft and sense of timing more convincing here than in the later version. What do you make of the fugue? Is it just too deliberate? Maybe you feel it is measured in a good way, although again I wonder whether there is enough inner life to compensate for the apparent caution.

HS I'm with you on the effectiveness of the build-up – it balances a sense of urgency and majesty, which feels just right. And

there's a real tenderness to the rapt passage that follows – not a quality that everyone would associate with this pianist. I like the way the fugue subject (from 20'10") is introduced, suitably staccato and *sotto voce*, and there's a certainty to the way Brendel builds up the textures. I agree that some artists take off more thrillingly when they reach the *energico* dotted rhythms (21'23"), but on the other hand that's not Brendel's vision for this piece. By the time we reach the *Più mosso* (22'37") with its *pesante* repeated chords, personally I find myself completely swept up in the tumult. And the re-emergence of the *Grandioso* melody at 23'46" has a kind of world-weary quality which I find more affecting than many more overtly beautiful renditions.

TP Your mention of a world-weary quality is spot-on. Personally, I would like just a little more abandon and tumultuous sweep, but I agree that the return of the *Grandioso* melody, now in a radiant B major, has a truly imposing dignity. Brendel manages to avoid allowing this work to seem in any way episodic: each passage connects organically with what has gone before, which is not something you can say about every performance. This is true of the coda, too – one of the most powerful of all sonata endings. Brendel conjures just the right sense of being completely drained by the end. So, all in all, do we think this recording still stands up as a classic?

HS It's extraordinary to think that Liszt's initial idea was to have the sonata ending vehemently. How much more powerful is a close with those seraphic floating chords! Others might find more sheer beauty at this point than Brendel does, but what he achieves above all is a sense of the epic nature of this journey. And it is this that continues to impress so mightily. I have no hesitation in concluding that this is still a classic account, despite the plethora of newer readings.

TP I think it remains a classic account, too. Those who prioritise virtuoso glamour should look elsewhere – this aspect of the work has provoked many more obviously pianistic responses, of which Argerich's thrill-a-minute blaze through the score is an extreme example. I think for a desert-island version, if one wanted such a thing, I might look for a recording with a finer balance of musical penetration and pianistic opulence (Zimerman, perhaps). But for an account that elevates musical concerns above all else, which in this of all Liszt's works is wholly appropriate, Brendel's 1981 recording deserves its place at the top table. **G**

Books



Rob Cowan enjoys Alex Ross's triumphant new book on Wagner:

'Ross has done more than anyone before him to trace the vast panoply of influences and offshoots that surround the Wagner phenomenon'



Jed Distler on the perceptive reflections of András Schiff:

'Schiff emphasises the importance of polyphony throughout music history and how it governs his interpretative priorities'

Wagnerism

Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music

By Alex Ross

HarperCollins, HB, 784pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-007-31905-3



First, the title. Could you conceive of a book called 'Bachism', 'Mozartism' or 'Beethovenism'? Probably not. The sorts of Vesuvian eruptions that Wagner caused, spilling into crevices where all the arts, as well as psychology, philosophy and politics, stunned and sometimes overwhelmed generations of listeners from the 19th century to the present day. No creative artist of the period has proved more influential than Wagner, and Alex Ross has done more than anyone before him to trace the vast panoply of influences and offshoots that surround the Wagner phenomenon like so much undergrowth in an endless mythical woodland, whether dramatic, intellectual, erotic, mystical or serenely spiritual.

Ross is the music critic for *The New Yorker* and although one could suppose summarise his immense achievement as 'Wagnerian', it's a great deal more than that. What Ross does, with a notably light pen, is to summon Wagner-tinted representatives in all creative media from all eras, whether on canvas, writing paper or music manuscript. The characters we encounter en route include the prairie-themed writer Willa Cather, Olive Fremstad (who sang Isolde under Mahler and Toscanini), poet and playwright Gabriele D'Annunzio and the doomed young Jewish psychologist Otto Weininger, who claimed that Wagnerising is often a superior surrogate for having sex. James Joyce, a fine tenor and a keen devotee of *bel canto*, who described *Finnegans Wake* as pure music, grew fonder of Wagner as he grew older.

As to politics, with Wagner, author of the notorious tract *Jewishness in Music*, the darkening spectre of anti-Semitism is an

obvious given, even when dealing with Aryans whose views were considered suspect. A 1933 'Protest of Richard Wagner's City of Munich' – signed by Richard Strauss, Hans Pfitzner and Hans Knappertsbusch – described Thomas Mann (whose wife was Jewish) as, among other things, unreliable and inexperienced. Then again, the director Patrice Chéreau accepted various characters in the music dramas as anti-Semitic and tried to humanise them.

Wagnerism and gay culture are often cited in the same breath. The Japanese author Yukio Mishima – who like the film director Luchino Visconti was a gay man attracted to fascist aesthetics – discovered Wagner through the composer's one-time acolyte, the philologist-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. The film *Patriotism* is a half-hour-long ode to seppuku (or hara-kiri); it has no dialogue, only intermittent handwritten titles, with a soundtrack that consists entirely of Leopold Stokowski's 1932 Philadelphia recording of his own *Tristan* 'symphonic synthesis'.

According to Ross, many of today's Wagner stagings are viewed as descended from the Kroll Opera's *Flying Dutchman* of 1929, which in terms of the theatre restored Wagner's power to shock. And there are some extraordinarily eloquent descriptions of what could be heard and seen at Bayreuth. One of the most magical is by Virginia Woolf, a cameo extract dealing with what she experienced when she strolled outside the Festspielhaus during the intermissions of a performance of *Parsifal*: a wide land, smooth and without hedges, the intermittent but not unmusical sound of insects and, later, the thinning light, and roads that are no longer criss-crossed by regular bars.

Ross himself is a dab hand when it comes to capturing the essence of a musical episode in words – see, for example, his extended description of The Ride of the Valkyries (page 565), with its mounting instrumental forces, climaxing when the contrabass tuba enters *fortissimo* beneath the trombones, conjuring a sense of reinforcements. The Valkyrie – also

the preferred name for XB-70 long-range US bombers – turns up again and again both as a source of musical stimulation and as a frequent visitor to film soundtracks (*Apocalypse Now* and *What's Opera, Doc?* being among the most celebrated). For the 1955 film *Magic Fire* the music director Erich Wolfgang Korngold condensed the entire *Ring* into a five-minute montage which he conducted on site. Not everyone applauded Wagnerian techniques used in films, though. Hanns Eisler and Theodor W Adorno bemoaned the leitmotif's reduction to the function of a musical lackey. On the other hand, Max Steiner claimed that if Wagner had lived in the 20th century he would have been the pre-eminent film composer, a viewpoint that Wagner's grandson Wolfgang fully endorsed, with the single caveat that his grandfather would have wanted to direct and write as well as compose.

When Charlie Chaplin watched Leni Riefenstahl's propaganda film spectacular *Triumph of the Will*, his immediate reaction, according to the Spanish-Mexican filmmaker Luis Buñuel, was to burst out laughing. Chaplin's own satire on Hitlerian histrionics *The Great Dictator* uses Wagner on the soundtrack, though interestingly he rescues the music from a Nazi context. DW Griffith's silent film *The Birth of a Nation*, which Ross claims set the pace for a century of Wagnerian aggression on film, is credited for bringing about a revival of the Ku Klux Klan. WEB Du Bois, the first Black American to earn a doctorate and a keen Wagnerist, claimed that his German sojourn made him realise that white people are after all human, whereas Luranah Aldridge, who unofficially 'broke the colour barrier' for Black opera singers in 1896, was cast by Cosima Wagner for the second Bayreuth *Ring* cycle, but fell ill.

Reading *Wagnerism* took me two weeks, and once through with it I felt as if I'd spent a fortnight in Bayreuth among affable and highly informed friends. It's a magnificent, eminently readable and often entertaining fund of knowledge and I recommend it unreservedly. **Rob Cowan**



Wagnerian achievement: Alex Ross explores the composer's enduring influence

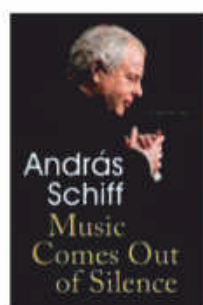
Music Comes Out of Silence

A Memoir

By András Schiff

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, HB, 352pp, £20

ISBN 978-1-474-61527-3



'A Memoir' is a slightly deceptive subtitle for this book. Its pages actually encompass Misha Donat's English translation of a 2017 publication in German from Henschel Verlag entitled *Musik kommt aus der Stille*. The first part consists of conversations between the pianist András Schiff and Swiss journalist Martin Meyer. The second part is given over to Schiff's writings, including collected CD booklet notes, prefaces for Urtext editions, tributes to mentors and myriad letters to newspaper editors. The conversations with Meyer progress from macro to micro, so to speak. They begin with general observations on music and move on to specific issues of repertoire and interpretation.

From the start, Schiff emphasises the importance of polyphony throughout

the history of music and how it generally governs his interpretative priorities. 'The art of piano playing consists of achieving the best possible distribution or balance of the voices. In a six- or eight-part chord no two notes are equal,' he says. When speaking of Western music's peaks and valleys, Schiff cites Bach as an absolute peak, the 'golden age' of classicism ending with Schubert's death in 1828, and a long period of static development following the 20th century's early years. Schiff acknowledges that he's being provocative when he says: 'These days, with contemporary music, you often feel as though you're in an airless space.'

On the other hand, Schiff sidesteps a potential trap when Meyer asks him if Beethoven is harder than other composers for women pianists, pivoting his answer towards the question of humour. 'Many pianists are wary of short notes,' claims Schiff. Consequently the pianists short-change these notes' underlying wit.

Schiff readily discusses his conscientious decision to defer playing Beethoven extensively until later in life. Yet he accurately admits to how the repertoire changed his pianism: 'My range of sound on the piano has become richer, more full and more differentiated through Beethoven.' In turn, Schiff found his Schubert-playing to grow more sonically focused and concentrated. Perhaps the word 'concentration' best characterises Schiff's basic musicianship, particularly when he speaks of his ability to hear and absorb works while silently reading them, along with habits of deliberation while practising. In other words, with Schiff, in-depth musical analysis comes prior to the technical process. 'Together with phrasing and articulation, attention always must be paid to the quality of sound.'

The pianist speaks frankly and vividly of formative years in Hungary and the trials

and tribulations of establishing himself in the West. Not surprisingly, he proves to be as uncompromising a citizen as he is a musician. In one article, Schiff condemns Viktor Orbán's far-right agenda. In 2000, Schiff courageously explained his refusal to appear in Austria as long as Jörg Haider and the Freedom Party were in power. Schiff waxes eloquently on the topic of composer manuscripts, citing chapter and verse in pursuit of relevant details that often escape from scholarly Urtext editions. In 1975 Charles Rosen alerted Schiff to an edition of Schumann's C major *Fantasia* reposing in Budapest's Széchényi Library containing a completely different and arguably superior ending than the familiar version. In the years since Schiff obtained a copy for Rosen, he has advocated the Budapest edition, as have several other notable pianists.

Perhaps Schiff offers his most revealing, detailed and touching observations when speaking of his musical mentors. Schiff likens Pál Kadosa, with whom he studied for eight years, to a good gardener, who 'tended the plants that were entrusted to him, cutting away wild shoots and eradicating the weeds'. Neither Schiff nor his fellow students realised that Kadosa's assistant, György Kurtág, was an extraordinary composer in his own right. However, for Schiff, the tough and unsparing Ferenc Rados was 'the best teacher I could have for piano technique'.

Schiff's 1978 Marlboro Festival sojourn brought him into close contact with Rudolf Serkin, who 'never looked for easy solutions' and 'never steered clear of difficulties'. By contrast, the violinist and conductor Sándor Végh gave the young Schiff crucial confidence, and became a cherished mentor and collaborator. When planning to record the Mozart piano concerto cycle for Decca, Schiff insisted that Végh conduct, further fuelling a volatile relationship with producer Ray Minshull, whom he found extremely difficult to work with. Happily Végh won out, and apparently prepared painstakingly, going so far as to hold extensive sectional rehearsals. Although Schiff did not study with Annie Fischer, he lights up when describing their close friendship, as well as her passion for coffee, cigarettes and beer. Social evenings often extended into the small hours, leaving everyone exhausted except for Fischer.

In sum, András Schiff proves just as articulate, as cultured and as provocative a musical thinker as he is at the piano throughout this highly recommendable book. **Jed Distler**

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings

Geraint Lewis traces the fascinating history on record of Britten's early masterpiece and chooses his 'must-have' available version

In early November 1944 the young tenor **Peter Pears** received a postcard from The Old Mill at Snape: 'I forgot to say in my other letter that I've heard the new Serenade "takes" – & they are terrific. The Dirge especially is a really super bit of singing, & the Orch. and Dennis are also fine. I'm a bit worried about the matching tho' ... Sing nicely – Love Ben.' Pears was singing Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* with Sadler's Wells in Glasgow but his mind was also full of the new music being written for him by his partner Benjamin Britten. The duo had just recorded one of these pieces, the Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings, Op 31, with the dazzling young horn player Dennis Brain and Britten himself conducting the Boyd Neel String Orchestra – his largely unheralded recording debut as a conductor. Not often can a *Gramophone* Collection begin to trace the recording history of a musical masterpiece so close to its composition. The Serenade was written in March and April 1943, first performed on October 15 at London's Wigmore Hall, and within the year, on May 25 and October 8, 1944, Decca recorded it at their new West Hampstead studios, so those 'takes' got to the composer pretty quickly!

Britten and Pears had only just returned to England in April 1942 after three heady years in North America – they left as friends and colleagues but returned as lovers and professional partners. They now had careers to re-establish, lives to rebuild and a new life together to negotiate, and the Serenade was to play an important part in this process. It was enthusiastically received at its premiere: 'we had a lovely show, with wonderful enthusiasm and

lovely notices', wrote Britten to a friend back in America, whereas many of his pre-1939 works had been dismissed as 'too clever by half' – one reason why he was so keen to leave England. And it gave Pears a new public profile as a young English singer to take seriously. The 1944 recording was to be an invaluable calling card for both artists. Britten had already made some recordings as a pianist with both Pears and the soprano Sophie Wyss and with fellow pianist Clifford Curzon, and he also had experience on the other side of the microphone as a producer, having supervised in July 1943 (as a favour to its imprisoned composer) the private sessions of Michael Tippett's Concerto for Double String Orchestra. The conductor for the Tippett was Berlin-born Walter Goehr, and it was Goehr who conducted his own orchestra in the premiere of Britten's Serenade at the Wigmore Hall as part of a promotional evening for composers published by Boosey & Hawkes under the enterprising Viennese-born Erwin Stein.

Many sensed a fresh new spirit blowing through the Serenade and in setting some classical English poets Britten had seemingly freed himself from a long association with WH Auden. It would perhaps be too simplistic to suggest that he broke the attachment with Auden as the result of a growing confidence in his relationship with Pears and the 'muse' his voice provided but he was also happy now to take other literary advice, as from the young critic and writer Edward Sackville-West, who made suggestions for the Serenade and to whom it is dedicated. Pears had already been helping Britten



with adapting George Crabbe's poem 'The Borough' into an opera libretto for *Peter Grimes* and Auden's innate sense of superiority, leading to a form of artistic bullying, was no longer needed on board. The Serenade was virtually a public declaration of a new beginning.

BLOW, BUGLE, BLOW

The first arresting sonority in the 1944 recording is the sound of Dennis Brain's immaculate horn-playing. As Britten



'Stourhead, 1981, the Temple of Flora, Bridge and Temple of the Sun' by John Piper (1903-92); he and his librettist wife Myfanwy were close friends of Britten

said at the time, he 'plays as flexibly and accurately as most clarinettists, & is a sweet and intelligent person as well'. Brain had asked Britten for a concerto upon first meeting the composer in 1942 but the result was a much less obvious response. The solution may or may not have been partly suggested by Stein (two birds with one stone) but it immediately adds a different dimension to the score. It becomes a cliché to talk about genius where Britten is concerned but the term is

so often simply unavoidable: the framing device of a Prologue and Epilogue for solo horn (the latter played offstage) using unexpected but unforgettable natural harmonics is a perfect case in point. One characteristic he retained throughout his life was the ability to create immediately memorable ideas which can also act as reservoirs for further development. The opening of the Pastoral (setting the 17th-century Charles Cotton) moves magically from the Prologue's clear

open F to a shaded D flat and subtly echoes the horn's opening rhythm. In tracing the vocal line at a distance the horn then 'paints' the sun's shadow while simultaneously enriching both vocal and instrumental textures.

What is it then that marks out the 1944 recording? On one level it is simply as close as we get to the world premiere itself and the realisation of the composer's intentions – in a sense, too, to the immediate sources of his sonic inspiration.



From left to right: legendary producer John Culshaw, Britten and Pears in Orford, Suffolk in 1967; Pears features on three of the Serenade recordings

Given his uncanny ear it is perhaps not surprising that everything he writes on paper registers perfectly as sound – but this recording is so clear and vivid that it literally set a template for all that were to follow. It is invaluable too in capturing for us the luminous and flexible clarity of Pears's light early voice and the sovereign sonority of Brain's sheer virtuosity. It was natural that Decca would select Boyd Neel's String Orchestra to support, given that they had already successfully issued their recording of the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge* (written for them to play at the Salzburg Festival in 1937) together with the earlier *Simple Symphony* (9/38, 10/39). Moreover, Britten had just written his ingenious Prelude

and Fugue for 18 strings for their 10th-anniversary concert and had tailored it to fit them like a glove, given that there were only 18 of them available! The players respond to every nuance in the Serenade with precision and Britten's direction is confident and authoritative. This recording – to pile on another truism – is, literally, history in the making: a rare opportunity to eavesdrop, as it were, over the bubbling cauldron of creativity.

The second recording of the Serenade was made in November 1953. Pears's voice had grown and matured over the intervening decade and the opportunity to re-record the work came with the first proper chance he was given to record *Les illuminations* of 1939 – a work

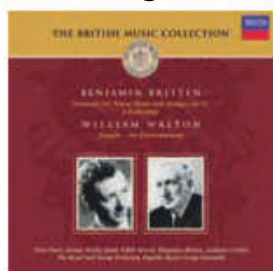
written originally for Sophie Wyss but which Pears had soon made his own (see Andrew Farach-Colton's *Gramophone Collection*, 3/09). Back in Decca's West Hampstead studios, Pears was reunited with Dennis Brain and the New Symphony Orchestra was conducted by Eugene Goossens. It may seem odd to us now that Britten wasn't automatically asked to conduct this himself – but the 1944 recording had in fact been something of an exception. Britten did not regard himself as a phenomenal conductor at this stage and was often very self-deprecating and doubtful as to his abilities. Goossens was a friend of long standing and so nothing untoward should be read into his presence here. Quite the contrary, in fact: he brings

THE HISTORIC CHOICE

Pears, Brain; Boyd Neel Orch / Britten
Decca ® 468 801-2DM

More than just a historic document: simply listen to Britten's mini-Mozart horn concerto with obligato tenor in the Hymn of Ben

Johnson, when with quicksilver brilliance and mercurial ease Pears and Brain capture Britten's new neoclassicism to perfection.



THE CLASSIC CHOICE

Rolfe Johnson, Thompson; SNO / Thomson
Chandos ® CHAN10192

Even a golden voice can conjure sinister unease in the elegy of Blake's Sick Rose after Michael Thompson's serpentine horn

uses Britten's daring reinterpretation of dogmatic serialism to embody the worm at the heart of beauty wreaking destruction and death.

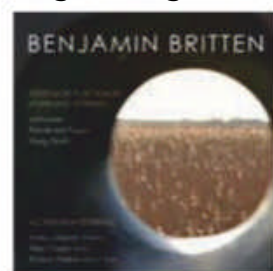


THE MODERN CHOICE

Clayton, Watkins; Aldeburgh Stgs / Daunert
Linn ® CKD478

You can feel the spirit of Britten abroad in his concert hall as the horn leaves the stage during Keats's Sonnet, leaving Allan

Clayton to set the perfect seal on slumber with magical viola harmonics sounding like a muted horn in the distance at the word 'Amen'.



a sure sense of both poise and drive to his direction and draws playing of verve and sensitivity. The producer of this recording was the legendary John Culshaw and his stamp is apparent in the spacing he gives both tenor and horn – regardless of age, this is one of the finest balances found for this piece. Brain's Prologue and Epilogue haunt the ear with a feeling at once of innocence and foreboding – an initial apprehension when on stage – and deep fulfilment as heard, to close, from afar.

By 1958 Britten had added for Pears a companion to the Serenade in the form of the Nocturne, Op 60, for tenor, strings and seven obbligato instruments. This was taken by Decca into Walthamstow Assembly Hall in September 1959, with Britten now conducting members of the LSO who included the horn player Barry Tuckwell. We now know that the Serenade was also recorded at these sessions – but we don't know why it was never released. It was May 1963 by the time the same forces were assembled again in London's Kingsway Hall to record the third version of the Serenade. This, to all intents and purposes, was regarded for years as the definitive modern version. It captures Pears in full authority – just a year after the *War Requiem* – and Tuckwell carries Brain's mantle with technical ease (his tragic early death in a 1957 road accident had shocked the musical world) and a sense of slipping into the role quite naturally. By now Decca was firmly established as Britten's 'house' label and the LSO his favoured 'full' orchestra. What strikes the ear is Pears's ability to sustain the voice and to retain agility across the compass without strain. In the anonymous 15th-century Dirge the voice provides a chilling refrain repeated through nine verses and opening on a challenging high G before falling through an octave only to rise again for the next verse. Pears can spin this line with spine-tingling acuity and no change of timbre – something true of few others.

BEYOND PEARS AND BRITTEN

So thoroughly did Pears 'own' Britten's legacy that other singers were naturally wary of trespassing on his territory. What would the Serenades of Wilfred Brown, Richard Lewis or Kenneth Bowen (among others) have been like? The first English tenor to venture on disc commercially was **Robert Tear** for EMI in 1970. He famously had a hot-and-cold relationship with Britten – and just in 1969-70 had turned down the prospect of the tailor-made part of Lechmere in *Owen Wingrave* in favour of creating Dov in Tippett's *The Knot Garden* for Covent Garden. This first



Anthony Rolfe Johnson: golden-voiced magnificence in 1988

recording by Tear – with Alan Civil and Neville Marriner in charge of the Northern Sinfonia – now seems a bit pallid in comparison with Pears. The younger singer naturally wishes to distance himself from the master but does so with moments of lightness that miss the darker undertones. These emerge more clearly in 1977 for DG in Chicago with Carlo Maria Giulini – an altogether heavier account with Tear's voice richer but more idiosyncratic. Both discs will appeal especially to Tear devotees but paradoxically now sound 'too much' like Tear for comfort.

We can sadly but quickly dispense with the foreign singers who bravely put a toe

in the chilly waters of the North Sea – **Peter Schreier** in Munich in 1967 and **Christoph Prégardien** with Osmo Vänskä in 1991. Both are technically and musically impeccable but fall at the inevitable linguistic hurdles – Schreier quite comically (a *Gramophone* review referred to it as "Allo Allo" English) and Prégardien more clinically. The one American tenor to enter the lists presents a very robust approach and **Jerry Hadley** in 1989 for Nimbus surmounts every challenge bravely. It is hard not to hear him now without the tragic shadow of his subsequent life adding darkness where it isn't. But this remains a noble memorial enriched by

the forensic playing of Anthony Halstead, who in terms of balance seems closer to the listener than does Hadley.

The one tenor who did perform the Serenade frequently under Pears's nose was **Gerald English** – and by some fluke a live 1969 concert with Barbirolli in Cologne emerged on ICA Classics in 2013. Anyone who knows and loves the fabulously evocative setting of Tennyson's Nocturne with its pulsing strings, echoing horn-calls and often exultant tenor should try this funereal version for a taste of the truly macabre. Having heard English in the flesh a few years after this performance I can testify that this wasn't the tempo he

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1944 Peter Pears , Dennis Brain; Boyd Neel Stg Orch / Benjamin Britten	Decca (M) 468 801-2DM (12/45 ^R , 8/86 ^R)
1953 Peter Pears , Dennis Brain; New SO / Eugene Goossens	Decca Eloquence (M) ELQ476 8470 (11/54 ^R)
1963 Peter Pears , Barry Tuckwell; LSO / Benjamin Britten	Decca (F) 417 153-2DH (9/64 ^R , 8/86)
1967 Peter Schreier , Günther Opitz; MDR SO / Herbert Kegel	Brilliant (B) 94728
1969 Gerald English , Hermann Baumann; WDR SO, Cologne / John Barbirolli	ICA Classics (M) ② ICAC5096 (8/13)
1970 Robert Tear , Alan Civil; Northern Sinf / Neville Marriner	EMI/Warner (B) ➔ 352286-2 (3/71 ^R)
1977 Robert Tear , Dale Clevenger; Chicago SO / Carlo Maria Giulini	DG (F) 423 239-2GC (1/80)
1988 Martyn Hill , Frank Lloyd; CLS / Richard Hickox	Virgin/Erato (M) ➔ 349923-2 (12/89 ^R)
1988 Neil Mackie , Barry Tuckwell; SCO / Steuart Bedford	EMI/Warner (S) (37 discs) 217526-2 (12/88 ^R)
1988 Anthony Rolfe Johnson , Michael Thompson; SNO / Bryden Thomson	Chandos (F) CHAN10192 (6/89 ^R)
1989 Jerry Hadley , Anthony Halstead; ESO / William Boughton	Nimbus (F) NI5234 (9/90)
1991 Christoph Prégardien , Ib Lanzky-Otto; Tapiola Sinfonietta / Osmo Vänskä	BIS (F) BIS-CD540 (8/92)
1994 Philip Langridge , Frank Lloyd; ECO / Steuart Bedford	Naxos (B) 8 557199 (12/94 ^R , 3/05)
1995 Ian Bostridge , Marie-Luise Neunecker; Bamberg SO / Ingo Metzmacher	EMI/Warner (F) ➔ 2435 56871-5; (M) ➔ 723547-2 (8/97 ^R)
1996 Adrian Thompson , Michael Thompson; Bournemouth Sinfonietta / David Lloyd-Jones	Naxos (B) 8 553834 (6/98)
2003 Toby Spence , Martin Owen; Scottish Ens / Clio Gould	Linn (F) BKD226 (5/05 ^R)
2005 Ian Bostridge , Radek Baborák; BPO / Simon Rattle	EMI/Warner (M) 558049-2 (12/05)
2011 James Gilchrist , Jasper de Waal; Amsterdam Sinfonietta / Candida Thompson	Channel Classics (F) (S) CCSSA32213 (3/13)
2011 Mark Padmore , Stephen Bell; Britten Sinf / Jacqueline Shave	Harmonia Mundi (F) (S) HMU80 7552 (6/12)
2013 Allan Clayton , Richard Watkins; Aldeburgh Stgs / Markus Dänert	Linn (F) CKD478 (5/16)

Gramophone Choice Recordings

Disc of the month

Beethoven	Piano Concerto 4 + Bruckner 7	Ax, Haitink	£21.00
Beethoven	Piano Concerto 4, Two Overtures	Heras-Casado	£11.50
Britten #	Peter Grimes (2SACD)	Skelton, Gardner	£22.50
Dowland	A Fancy	Bor Zuljan	£12.00
Janáček	Cunning Little Vixen (2CD)	Crowe, LSO, Rattle	£14.00
Liszt	+ Thalberg Opera Transcriptions etc.	Hamelin	£11.00
Respighi	Pines, Fountains & Festivals of Rome	J. Wilson	£11.00
Saint-Saëns	Le Timbre d'argent (2CD + BOOK)	Les Siècles, Roth	£28.00
Schumann	Symphonies Nos. 1 & 4	Roth	£12.00
Smetana	Libuše (incomplete)	Talich	£12.00
	After Silence (2CD)	Voces8	£12.50
	Portraits de la Folie	d'Oustrac, Gaillard	£11.50

New Releases for September & October 2020

Bach J S	St John Passion (2CD)	Suzuki	£22.00
Beethoven	Violin Concerto	Lozakovich, Gergiev	£11.00
Beethoven	Piano Trios (2CD)	Smetana Trio	£16.00
Beethoven	Variations	Angela Hewitt	£11.00
Brahms	Symphony No.1, Tragic Overture	Blomstedt	£11.50
Bruckner	Symphonies (6CD)	Bayerischen RSO, M. Jansons	£35.00
Coates	Orchestral Works 2	BBC Philharmonic, J. Wilson	£11.00
Handel	Semele (3CD)	Alder, Hymas, Gardiner	£24.00
Haydn	String Quartets Op.33 (2CD)	Doric String Quartet	£11.00
Mahler	Lieder	Christiane Karg, Martineau	£11.50
Mahler	Rosbaud Conducts Mahler (8CD)	Rosbaud	£42.00
Mahler	Das Lied von der Erde	Budapest FO, I. Fischer	£11.50
Respighi	Pines & Fountains of Rome, Aria etc.	Chailly	£11.00
Schubert	Symphonies 2 & 3	Jacobs	£11.50
Schmidt	Complete Symphonies (3CD)	Frankfurt RSO, Järvi	£24.00
Strauss R	Tod und Verklärung, Don Juan etc.	Ticciati	£12.00
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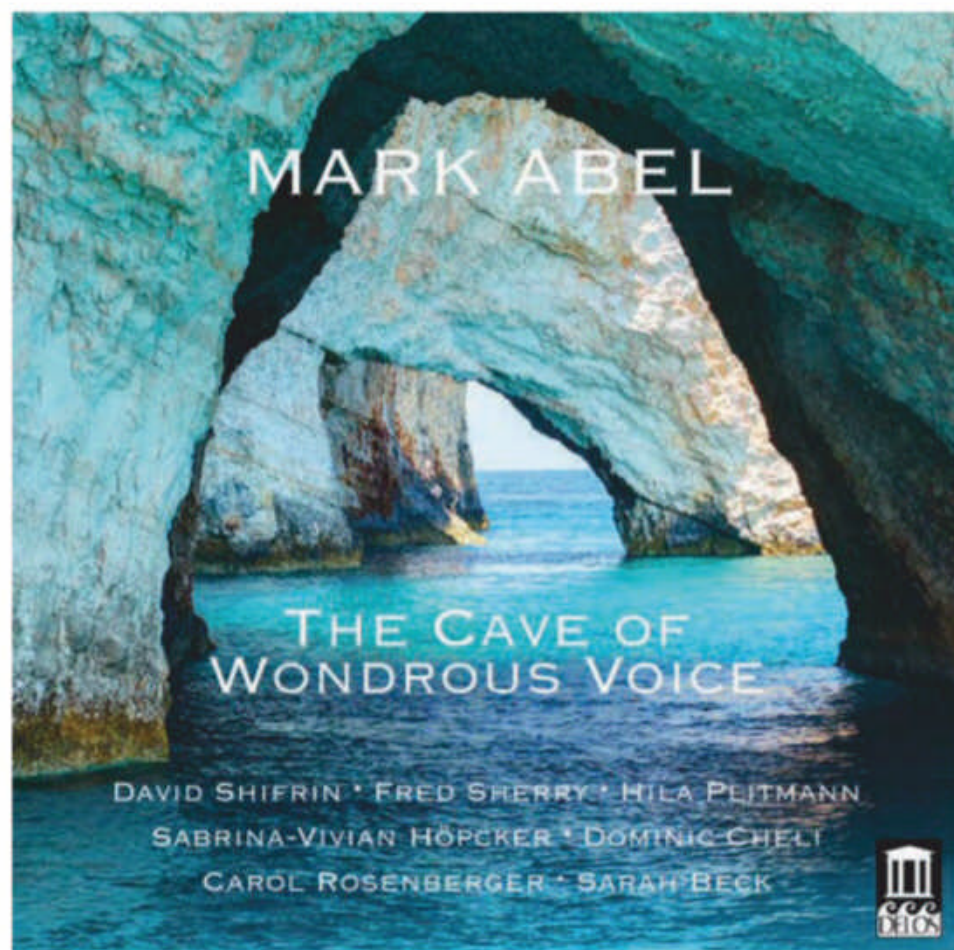
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A Spreading of Wings

David Shifrin, Fred Sherry, Hila Plitmann, Carol Rosenberger, Sabrina-Vivian Höpcker, Dominic Cheli and Sarah Beck bring their great talents to Abel's first chamber album. Featured are his *Clarinet Trio* and *Four Poems of Marina Tsvetaeva*, the first setting in English of the revered and tragic Russian poet.

"The Clarinet Trio ... , poetic, engaging and philosophical material that these superb players afford colorful and lyrical delineation. The Tsvetaeva songs take full advantage of Plitmann's 'wondrous voice,' which gleams in all registers Her attention to meaning suffuses every phrase."

— Donald Rosenberg, *Gramophone*

"Abel shows a remarkable sensitivity not only in composing for the particular instruments, but in expressing himself with them. The music is contemporary, but accessible with melodic and harmonic lines that one notices and remembers. Abel has announced his arrival as a serious chamber music composer."

— Henry Schlinger, *CultureSpot LA*

"... Abel represents the best strain in contemporary American composers who can merge their musical gifts with a sensitive, far-reaching intellect. He brings up to date the strain of literary delving found in Schumann and Debussy."

— Huntley Dent, *Fanfare*



Pears gives a definitive performance under Eugene Goossens in 1953

took then – but the nasal whine and often strangled sounds seem closer at times to the expressionist and surreal than to anything appropriate to Britten's natural, even Purcellian word-setting. It would have been wiser to keep this account safely locked in the WDR archive.

DIGITAL SERENADES

Of the 1988-96 vintage, quite a number of performances are truly outstanding and any fears expressed (quite commonly) at the time of Britten's death in 1976 that his music would die with Pears are eloquently exploded. It is also a tribute to the clarity and consistency of Britten's score that the vast majority of these recordings adhere closely to the spirit of his own performances. One of the finest comes from the sorely underrated **Martyn Hill**, who sings with strength and intelligence in a symbiotic partnership with Richard Hickox for Virgin in 1988. Also in 1988, **Neil Mackie** for EMI carries Pears's own imprimatur and has the advantage of Britten's latter-day assistant Stuart Bedford at the helm; but he emerges as something of a characterless carbon copy (despite singing 'sleet' instead of

'fleet' with his teacher's approval in the Dirge). Third of the 1988 vintage is the peerless **Anthony Rolfe Johnson** for Chandos with a polished SNO under Bryden Thomson. He sings with golden-voiced magnificence and is arguably the first singer since Pears to make the music absolutely his own without any need of artifice or effort: this is simply glorious singing and purely in that sense it remains unsurpassed.

Also in a class of his own is **Philip Langridge** – less mellifluous, perhaps, but characterised by a sinewy brilliance which is unmistakable. As caught in 1994 by Collins Classics (now Naxos), however, the voice sometimes strains in its top register, expressive though this can sound: this is the darkest-hued Serenade on disc. By contrast, **Ian Bostridge** in 1995 is fleet of foot and unpretentious but

misses the depths of the score where the equally youthful-sounding John Mark Ainsley (also for EMI in 1995) does not. Sadly deleted at present, his version is blessed by the beneficent presence of the miraculous young David Pyatt – for my money the best horn player since Brain – and an interpretation to treasure, which if available could well have been one of my top choices. **Adrian Thompson** for Naxos (1996) is sadly no more than reliable and is less agile or expressive than his contemporaries.

TENORS OF TODAY

The younger generation of singers – those still currently active – are strongly represented in 2003 by **Toby Spence** with the Scottish Ensemble on Linn. His is the most vulnerable-sounding version and in many ways the most moving. The odd frailty in the upper register curiously adds to this effect, but the voice is recorded just that bit too distantly. Admirers of Ian Bostridge may relish him in 2005 with Simon Rattle but a decade has added mannerism and preciousness to the former innocent radiance and the Berlin strings are (perhaps surprisingly) never

superior to those of Bamberg under Ingo Metzmacher – this would be the Bostridge choice. **James Gilchrist** and **Mark Padmore** share a Cambridge pedigree as well as sterling vocal intelligence and musical insight. Just as performances both are superb in their own ways but Channel Classics for Gilchrist is diffuse in overall sound whereas Harmonia Mundi for Padmore is close and airless, thus making the Britten Sinfonia sound too small and claustrophobic around him. Linn for **Allan Clayton** in 2013 had the supreme good sense to go to Snape Maltings and this unique building immediately places a golden halo around Richard Watkins's rich-toned horn. Of all today's singers Clayton has the greatest colour and range, character and versatility, and he is matched in imagination by the vibrant Aldeburgh Strings.

One postlude. Britten never meant us to know that he had composed another movement for the proposed Serenade in 1943 – a calmly voluptuous setting of Tennyson's 'Now sleeps the crimson petal'. It ended up among Erwin Stein's posthumous papers and has been recorded (with permission) by Mackie, Prégardien and Gilchrist. There were probably all kinds of reasons why Britten left it out before first performance, recording and publication. Only Gilchrist's daringly tender and erotic account convinces as music but it also confirms that Britten was right to abandon it.

The Serenade as it stands is perfect – how so, however, is impossible to analyse. A visit to The Red House at Aldeburgh today tells of the delight taken by Pears and Britten in regularly rearranging their extensive collection of paintings. But only Britten ultimately knew how to put in sequence his disparate settings of varied poems to create the ideal effect both individually and collectively. And Pears still reigns supreme when it comes to bringing that collection alive. **G**

THE DEFINITIVE CHOICE

Pears, Brain; New SO / Goossens

Decca Eloquence [®] ELQ476 8470

Some over the decades have disparaged Pears's unique voice, Dudley Moore's brilliant parody of both composer and singer notwithstanding. But even if it can still be thought of as an 'acquired taste', there is



no doubt in my mind that he was one of the greatest musicians of the 20th century and this definitive and underrated recording is simply irreplaceable.

ORANGES & LEMONS

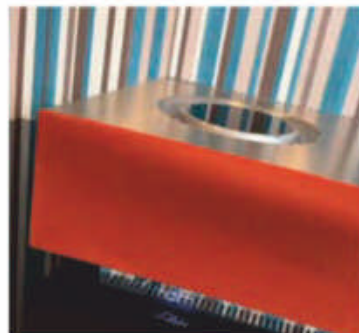
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THIS MONTH A slimline streaming solution from Lumin, breathtaking high-end headphones from Focal – and why don't we hide away all those big black boxes?

Andrew Everard, Audio Editor

OCTOBER TEST DISCS



A wonderfully lush and dramatic reading of some Rimsky orchestral favourites, beautifully rendered in hi-res DSD and DXD on LAWO.



Recorded under lockdown conditions with small musical forces, this Bach recital on Alpha Classics has a really intimate presence in 96kHz/24-bit.

If you need to ask the price ...

New speakers dominate the news this month, including a massive Magico, Signature versions from B&W and more

We've become used to big, heavy and pricey speakers from California-based Magico. However, it seems the company has outdone itself with the launch of its new flagship model, the M9 **1**. Described as 'a summation of our no-holds-barred assault on the limits of dynamic loudspeaker design', the four-way, six-driver speakers stand over 2m tall, with each weighing 454kg, complete with an enclosure formed from carbon fibre skins over an internal aluminium honeycomb. The price? We're in 'if you need to ask' territory here: it's officially 'on application' but you're not going to get much change out of £850,000 for a pair of M9s – and that's before you start to consider the amplification to drive them. The M9s come with an offboard analogue crossover, the MXO – with an external power supply – to separate the bass going to the two 38cm bass drivers in each speaker from the rest of the frequency. Given that, and the fact that the speaker can handle up to 2000W, you're going to need a pair of substantial power amplifiers, or probably a quartet of high-end monoblocs. Magico describes the M9 as 'a revelation, a loudspeaker that can present intense crescendos with unconstrained power, yet reproduce the most delicate musical passages with transparency and stunning microdynamic detail'.

Rather more affordable is the new Signature line-up from Bowers & Wilkins **2**, based on two models from its established 700 Series, the 702 and 705. The most obvious change is the use of a new 'Datuk Gloss' ebony-coloured wood veneer, with each pair of speakers being grain-matched but no two pairs looking quite

the same due to the nature of the material. Over this Bowers & Wilkins applies nine coats of finish and fits bright metal trim rings round the drivers, with a matching grille on the carbon dome tweeter mounted in its own pod atop each speaker. Within, the speakers use 'specially treated and upgraded bypass capacitors sourced from Mundorf, larger heatsinking and, in the case of the 702, upgraded LF capacitor on the bass section of the crossover'. The new models, which also carry a 'Signature' plate on their rear panels, sell for £2699/pr for the standmount three-way 705 Signature and £4499/pr for the three-way floorstanding 702 Signature, representing a price premium of £850 and £1100 respectively over the standard 700 S2 series designs on which they're based.

ATC is also going down the 'special edition' path with its new SCM150ASLT active speaker system **3**. The new model, which costs £46,600/pr, uses both drivers and amplification of in-house design, with the new 25mm neodymium soft-dome tweeter, 75mm soft-dome mid-range and low-distortion bass unit each driven by its own amplifier channel. The P6 Class AB amplifier delivers 200W to the bass driver in each speaker, with 100W for each mid-range and 50W per tweeter, with XLR inputs on the 'master' speaker and a 10-pin LEMO connector to link to the other enclosure. Standing around 1.4m tall and weighing 116kg apiece, the speakers are handbuilt, finished in selected European crown-cut walnut veneer with a high-gloss polyester lacquer, stainless steel badge and input panel, and mounted on a limited-edition plinth.



More modest in size and price but no less in ambition are the new The Fives speakers from US manufacturer Klipsch **4**. Not only are these bookshelf-sized speakers, selling for £849/pr in black or walnut, actively driven with built-in amplification, they also have an extensive range of inputs, effectively making them a complete system in a pair of speakers. A total of 80W of amplification is provided for each speaker, with 20W for the 25mm tweeter mounted in its Tractrix horn and 60W for the 11.43cm mid/bass driver with rear-venting reflex loading. Inputs include moving magnet phono/line analogue, with an extra 3.5mm aux input, USB and optical digital, Bluetooth and even an HDMI port for TV sound, complete with Audio Return Channel capability. The speakers will support audio formats up to 192kHz/24-bit, and have a Dynamic Bass EQ system for low-level listening and an output for a subwoofer.

Finally, a (slightly) more conventional system in the form of Ruark's £629 tabletop R3 **5**, offering Wi-Fi/Ethernet streaming, a CD player, Bluetooth with aptX and a radio tuner with DAB/DAB+/FM and internet radio. It also has auxiliary digital and analogue inputs and a USB-C port for the connection of external devices. With 30W of Class AB amplification and Ruark's in-house drive units, it comes in a choice of rich walnut veneer or soft grey lacquer, with a texture grey grille. **6**

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Lumin D2

This slimline unit, with a total absence of controls, is a superb do-it-all streaming solution with a captivating sound



LUMIN D2

Type Network music player

Price £1845

Inputs Ethernet network and USB Type A

Outputs Analogue audio (fixed/variable) on RCA and balanced XLRs, digital on BNC

Online services Qobuz, Spotify and Tidal (with MQA decoding), Apple AirPlay, internet radio, Roon-ready

File formats handled Up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD128

Dimensions (WxHxD) 30x6x24.4cm

luminmusic.com

When it comes to streaming music, it often seems that less is more. Unlike amplifiers and receivers, which seem to sprout extra controls with every new set of features, the more capable ‘computer audio’ devices become, the less they seem to have on show. Why? The answer is simple: these days more of the control of such units is as networked as their music playback, with all operation moved to an app running on the user’s smartphone or tablet.

That’s certainly the case with the Lumin D2 we have here, which at £1845 is almost the entry-level model in an extensive network audio range from its Hong Kong-based manufacturer. Below it sit the £1495 M1, which is a complete ‘just add speakers’ unit with built in amplification, and the U1 (£1695), which is described as a ‘mini audiophile network transport’. The U1’s outputs are digital-only, meaning it

has to be used with an offboard digital-to-analogue converter or an amplifier with such conversion built-in – and that makes the D2 the most affordable conventional component player in the Lumin range.

Unsurprisingly, the D2 is the latest version of the company’s D1, replacing the earlier model’s external power supply with an internal transformer for a much neater look, enhanced by the top-plate overhang to the rear concealing the connection panel, and the very compact dimensions of the unit, which is just 30cm wide and 6cm tall. It’s available in either ‘raw aluminium’ silver or black, and in the latter finish the review sample presents a very understated face to the world, its only apparent feature being the deep-set, blue-lit display panel (which you can also dim or extinguish). Beyond a power switch to the rear, beside the IEC mains inlet, there are no controls on the D2.

If you’ve never heard of Lumin, a short history lesson might be in order. The parent company is Pixel Magic Systems, which started in business making audiovisual products: it developed its own video processors and is now Hong Kong’s major supplier of digital HDTV receivers and recorders. Its first Lumin product was the A1 in 2012, the current version of which now sells for £5495, while the range-topping model is the £11,595 X1; and as well as network players the company also has a music library unit, the L1, starting from £895 depending on storage capacity, and a linear power supply upgrade for all its -1 series models.

Compact the D2 may be, and simple in its connectivity – with Ethernet and USB Type A inputs, outputs on RCA and balanced XLR analogue sockets, plus BNC digital – but this is actually an extremely capable and flexible little unit. For a start,

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Lumin D2 is exceptionally flexible. Here are some ideas to make the most of it ...

APPLE IPAD

Apple's iPad is the perfect device to control the Lumin, running the excellent app provided by the network player's manufacturer.



NAD C268

With its high-quality volume-control software, the Lumin D2 can be used straight into a power amplifier: this NAD C268 would be a good choice.



it can be used as a conventional source component, outputting at line level into an amplifier or pre-amplifier, or – at the flick of a virtual switch in the app – bring into the equation a high-quality volume control, allowing direct connection to a power amplifier or active loudspeakers.

Going right back to its first product Lumin has been a strong supporter of DSD Audio, and the D2 – using one Wolfson WM8741 converter for each channel, working in balanced mode – is able to handle DSD128 as well as 384kHz/32-bit DXD files, as well as upsampling files at up to 96kHz to 192kHz or DSD before processing.

The D2 presents a very understated face to the world, its only feature being the blue-lit display panel

Networking here is wired only, via a 1000Base-T Ethernet port: there's no provision for Wi-Fi or any Bluetooth connectivity, re-emphasising the fact that this is a purist solution, designed for performance. With the network connected, the D2 can stream music not only from network storage but also via services including Qobuz, Spotify and Tidal (with MQA decoding for Tidal Masters streams), plus Apple AirPlay and internet radio via the TuneIn platform. It's also Roon-ready, enabling it to be integrated with other Roon-capable devices in a multiroom system, or you can use Lumin's own multiroom system, available only with an all-Lumin network, to achieve whole-house audio. In that configuration, one player is designated as the 'sender', and all the others as 'receivers', which follow the 'master' player. Multiroom operation is at 192kHz/24-bit maximum, to which the 'sender' downsamples and downconverts as required for transmission to the 'receivers'.

One aspect of the D2's simplicity is that the only manual you get is a little single-sheet quickstart guide in the box. This may seem overly basic but will get you going, after which everything is in the hands of the Lumin app. Fortunately that app is excellent, even if its comprehensive nature

makes its icons a bit small when used on a phone screen. It's better, if you can, to invest in a budget tablet to use as a remote for the Lumin.

PERFORMANCE

Setting up the Lumin involved two 'go and make a cup of tea' events. First there was a short hiatus for the almost inevitable firmware update, then a much longer wait while the player indexed my music collection, which is admittedly huge – a normal library would be indexed much faster, and after all this initial scan is only a one-off event, after which the system will do much faster re-scans if new music is added to the library.

Though the D2 sounds best when connected via its balanced analogue outputs to suitable amplification – with its excellent lossless Leedh Processing digital volume control especially impressive when the unit is used straight into a power amplifier – it's also extremely good when used at fixed gain into a pre-amp or integrated amp. This is a player almost devoid of any overt character of its own, being neither brash nor soft and lush: instead it treads a well-judged middle path designed to deliver no shortage of timbral and tonal information, while ensuring the music communicates directly with the listener.

Playing Sonia Wieder-Atherton's recent recording of Bach's First and Second Solo Cello Suites (Alpha), the Lumin immediately impresses not only with the sound of bow on string and the resonance of the instrument but also the reverberation of the recorded acoustic, instantly placing the performance in a realistic space before the listener. These characteristics are also much in evidence with the Valen Trio's 'Svev' recital of chamber works by Knut Vaage (LAWO): the often percussive, frequently highly dynamic recording shines in the hands of the open, fast Lumin sound. Larger orchestral forces, such as the Orchestra of the Americas in Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat* (Linn – see page 39) are treated to a superb combination of sheer dynamic slam and weight, coupled with speed and fluidity. It makes for a truly thrilling listen, and creates a firm case for putting the minimalist Lumin firmly on the 'must listen' list for anyone looking for a network player. **G**

Or you could try ...

Though it does have its own display, the Lumin D2 is best used 'headlessly', under the control of the company's very slick app running on a tablet or smartphone. That's a growing trend among network players of this kind, many of which no longer bother fitting a display panel most will never use.

Audiolab 6000N Play

Audiolab's 6000N Play is one of the most affordable network players on the market, with both wired and wireless connectivity, plus a bank of six preset buttons on the front panel that can be allocated to favourite services, such as internet radio stations. At its heart is the Play-Fi multiroom system from DTS, which comes with a highly intuitive app that will even let you adjust the volume of a connected Audiolab amplifier. For more details, see audiolab.co.uk.



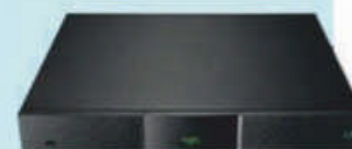
Leema Elements Streamer

Leema's Elements Streamer is one of the simplest-looking on the market. This compact unit is designed for use in a wide range of systems as well as with Leema's own electronics, and will access streaming services including Deezer, Qobuz, Spotify, Tidal and vTuner internet radio, as well as playing music from network storage and USB drives. Handbuilt in Wales, it combines no-nonsense functional design with a great sound. Find out more at leema-acoustics.com.



Naim ND5 XS 2

The Naim ND5 XS 2 is something of a departure for the Naim ND- range. Whereas the NDX 2 and ND555 have large, full-colour displays, the Salisbury company has decided not to fit a display on its entry-level model. Instead, this highly flexible model is entirely driven by the excellent Naim app, which makes both network playback and streaming music services extremely simple. It sounds superb, too. Read more at naimaudio.com.



● REVIEW FOCAL CLEAR

'Phones with focus and clarity

The latest headphones from the well-known French speaker maker live up to their name

As has been noted in these pages, there's been a huge boom in headphones in recent years. From new brands entering the market to established speaker and electronics brands developing their own headphone lines, there's never been greater choice for those looking for personal listening solutions. Alongside the headphones themselves, there has been an explosion in the availability of devices designed to drive them, from pocket-size amplifiers designed to fit between a phone and a pair of headphones, to full-size hi-fi components combining digital-to-analogue conversion with amplification that can drive even the most demanding headphones.

The French speaker company Focal was into this burgeoning market pretty sharpish, launching its Spirit headphones in 2012 and rolling out its unashamedly upmarket Utopia model, sharing a name with its flagship speaker range, four years later. The link with the speakers was reinforced by the technology at the core of the Utopia model, which the company described as 'the world's smallest speaker driver'.

The initial range was extremely well received – I still have a pair of the highly revealing closed-back Focal Spirit Pro headphones in regular use, and they're still exceptionally good despite having led a fairly tough life. On the back of that first line-up the company has built an extensive headphone range, with models for home use, listening on the move and professional applications. The £3700 Utopia remains the company's flagship model, with the range starting with the Spark in-ears at just over £50, and there's a dedicated Focal DAC/headphone amplifier for the serious home listener, the £2500 Arche, complete with integral headphone stand.

It's fairly safe to say that the company has all the bases covered when it comes to its headphone range. As well as the open-backed Clear model tested here, at just under £1400, the line-up also offers the £849 Elegia model for those who prefer a closed-back design, whether to keep outside noise at bay or one's own music within. Certainly if you want a pair of headphones to allow you to enjoy your music while others are doing their own thing in the same room, the Elegia is perhaps the best choice; but for those listening thus because

they want to, not because they have to, the Clear has much to commend it.

Focal prides itself on making all of its higher-range models in-house in France, right down to the drive-units, and that's the case with the Clear, which uses a single 40mm full-range driver for each channel, made from an aluminium/magnesium alloy, and with a unique M-shaped profile, giving rigidity without weight, driven by a motor using a new copper voice-coil. The driver is designed for low impedance, allowing the headphones to be driven by portable music players, even though the Clear headphones are mainly designed for 'at home' use. The earpieces are suspended on a solid aluminium yoke finished with a leather and microfibre covered headband, the perforations inside the band matching those on the 20mm memory foam ear-cushions, ensuring a snug fit without the headphones becoming hot or clammy in use.

Sockets on each earpiece accept the cable connecting to the device with which the Clear is used. Focal supplies three cables with the headphones: one terminated with a full-size 6.35mm plug, another with a 3.5mm plug for portable devices and some smaller systems, and a four-pin balanced XLR cable for use with headphone amplifiers. Thus the user can change the cable for one with another connector if required: for example, I have a couple of portable players using miniature plugs for balanced output, and it was a moment's work to switch the Clears over to a suitable cable. Completing the package is a fitted hard-shell travel/storage case.

PERFORMANCE

Three things struck me when first using the Focal headphones, the first being that though they're no featherweight, at 450g, they felt light and comfortable after minimal adjustment of the headband extension and the swivels of the earpiece hangers. Far too many headphones take a fair bit of fiddling but the Clear just seems to 'find its place' with minimal fuss. The second aspect of these headphones is the sense of openness. Even without music playing, there's none of that sense of being shut in, and this carries through to the third impressive aspect, which is the freedom and airiness of the sound they deliver. If you're used to headphones



FOCAL CLEAR

Type Open-back headphones

Price £1399

Drivers 40mm aluminium/magnesium full range

Sensitivity 104dB/1mW @ 1kHz

Frequency response 5Hz-28kHz

Impedance 55 ohms

Accessories supplied Cables with 3.5mm and 6.35mm plugs, balanced cable with XLR plug, carrying case

Weight 450g

focal.com

sounding slightly claustrophobic, and the music all in your head, it's likely the Focals will come as something of a revelation.

I drove the Clear with a variety of amplification, from my iPhone 8 Plus via Apple's little in-line converter to a Chord Mojo, an Onkyo personal music player (complete with that tiny balanced output) and dedicated headphone amplifiers from Lehmannaudio and T+A, the last of these being a heavyweight amp with a price tag getting on for five times that of the headphones themselves.

While the Clear definitely responds to high-quality partnering electronics, delivering really visceral bass with the two German headphone amps, these headphones are more than capable of delivering a sparkling, expressive and involving presentation with more modest amplification. Playing Dana Zemtsov and Anna Fedorova's 'Silhouettes' (Channel Classics) via the headphone output of my Naim Supernait 3 amplifier, I was delighted with the natural weighting of the piano sound and the sense of space around the performers, while the attack of Arabella Steinbacher's recording of the *Four Seasons* of Vivaldi and Piazzolla (Pentatone) and the scale of the Oslo PO/Petrenko reading of Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade* (LAWO, 8/20) showed that these headphones excel not only when it comes to speed and definition but also with power and weight. Firmly recommended. **G**

● ESSAY

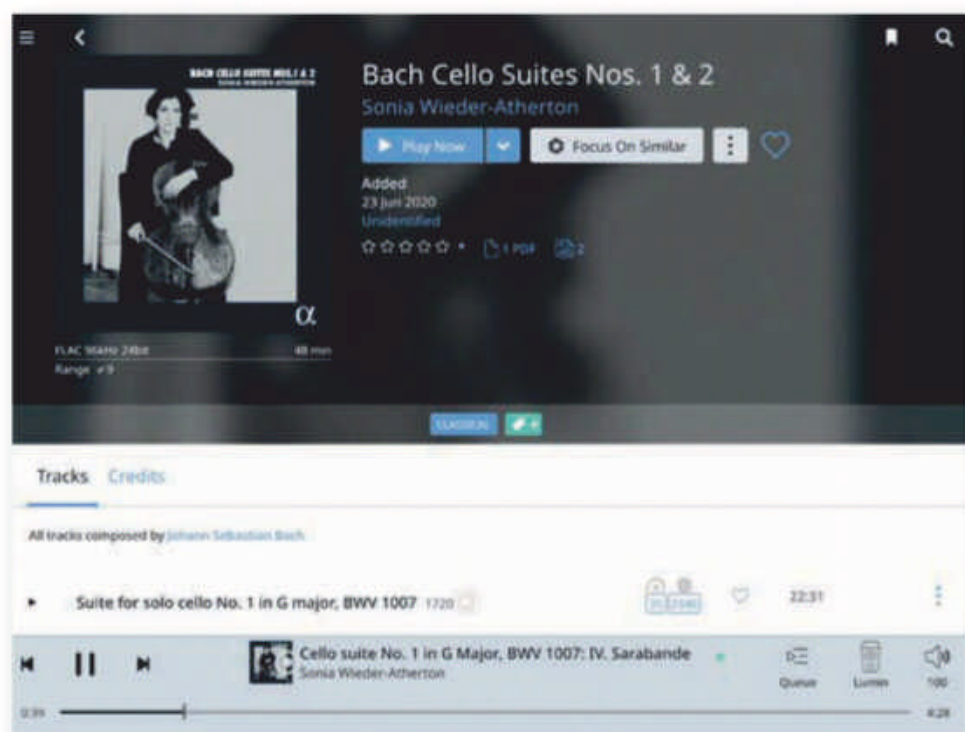
‘But surely you can’t actually see what you’re doing?’

The move towards ‘computer music’ and network streaming is changing the way hi-fi equipment looks – for the better, suggests Andrew Everard

One of the pleasures of reviewing hi-fi equipment – well, apart from the constant flow of fine music played well and a seemingly never-ending throughput of intriguing equipment on which to play it – is the reaction of visitors to both the sound and the appearance of whatever I happen to have in my ever-changing system when they appear. For all the suggestion that we hi-fi reviewers spend our lives in monastic isolation, I find the stream of new products being installed and then packed up attracts some friends in classic ‘moth to flame’ fashion: I had a neighbour, now sadly passed away, who experienced my system once in full flow – well, it was a hot day and the windows were open! – and thereafter seemed to find all kinds of excuses to pop round and see and hear what was playing. I swear he kept a close eye on the near-daily visits from courier companies and made a bee-line for my door when he spotted something interesting.

In recent times, however, he became rather confused with what was actually producing the music: yes, the speakers were obvious enough, as big wooden boxes bedecked with what were obviously drive units; but faced with a stack of similar-looking black boxes, he hunted in vain for something showing tracks or titles before giving up and saying ‘But surely you can’t actually see what you’re doing?’ The response was, of course, at hand – or literally in hand – in the form of a trusty tablet device on which all was revealed, in the form of a display of the playing track, which turned at a swipe to a listing of all the music by a particular artist or of a certain genre, ripe for the picking.

The first time I handed over the iPad to my elderly visitor – well, he was a decade or more senior to me, so I guess that counts – he had a look I’d only ever seen before in that old TV series where plucky squaddies defused unexploded bombs in the streets of wartime London. ‘What happens if I do something wrong?’ he asked, to which I replied that the very worst was that



Keep taking the tablet: screens are making instrument displays redundant

nothing would happen. Reassured, he was soon scooting around my music library with alacrity and excitement, and that ‘Have you got another beer in that fridge?’ moment arrived very quickly indeed. Only when a lull in the music ensued did he give me what my dear mother used to call an old-fashioned look, and opine that ‘All this must make your life so easy – you don’t even have to get up and change the record’. Curses – rumbled ...


The stream of new products being installed and then packed up attracts friends in classic ‘moth to flame’ fashion

Considering some of the equipment I have had through my hands in recent times reminded me of that conversation, not least because I seem to have been having ‘nights are drawing in’-length listening sessions almost every day since sometime back in March. In all that time, I can’t remember when I last handled a conventional remote control handset or peered across the room at a distant display in an effort to see what was playing. Yes, the computer has taken over, in the form of a handy tablet (or even my phone), and it’s changing the way our hi-fi systems look and perform – for the better, I’d say.

Most of the music players I have auditioned this year have had either no display or, at best, a vestigial one doing not

much more than indicating that the unit is powered up by giving the briefest of ‘now playing’ information. Such displays were adequate when all one needed to see was that the disc was loaded and playing but are these days woefully inadequate for searching a music library, whether on home storage or somewhere on the internet, to select an album or track to play – let alone setting up a playlist or trying to find another recording by a chosen orchestra, composer or conductor.

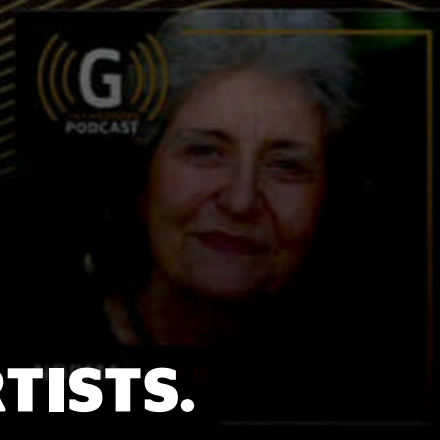
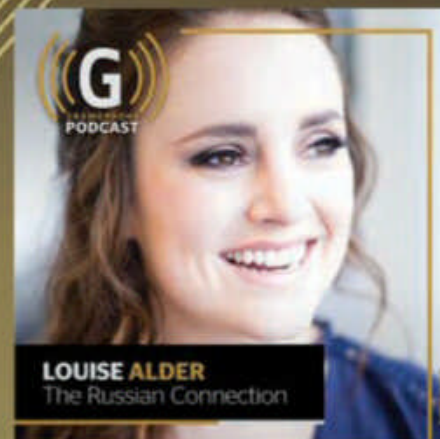
So, given that all the content is coming over a network connection, local or across the world, why not use a connected device to access it and enjoy the added benefits of allowing a computer to search your library in any way you could imagine to find you the music you want – or even take you on a journey of adventure, led by intelligent algorithms programmed through careful curation? If all of that sounds far too virtual to you, consider this: once we’ve established that we don’t need to fish down the side of the sofa to find a remote control, then squint across the room to see what our key-presses are doing, why can’t these new display-less black boxes be put away in a cupboard? After all, they don’t need to be in the listener’s line of sight, as you could even operate a stack of electronics in another room with your handheld device. Don’t believe me? Ask a friend of mine who has discovered that it’s much easier to impose a curfew on his teenagers’ music using a swipe on a screen, rather than yelling up the stairs in the time-honoured manner.

We could be on the brink of the next step of the hi-fi revolution: having consigned our music collections to computer storage or internet libraries, it might just be time to put all those black boxes out of sight, and free up even more space. Now, about those 2m-tall half-tonne speakers with which this section opened ... 



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NOTES & LETTERS

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In awe of Mahler's Eighth

In his review of Stephen Johnson's book, *The Eighth* (August, page 94), Peter Quantrill names conductors 'who would not touch' Mahler's Eighth Symphony 'or only with serious misgivings'. His inclusion of Otto Klemperer among these is misleading. In 1910, Klemperer attended rehearsals for the Eighth in Munich and was immensely impressed by the work, and remained in awe of it throughout his life. He had serious reservations about Mahler's First, Third and Fifth symphonies, but he admired both the Sixth, and even more the Eighth. He wished to perform and record it but the opportunity never presented itself. In 1967 he expressed a wish to perform it for the first time, and to record it in the Royal Albert Hall, but EMI was alarmed at the potential huge costs in such a project, and Klemperer's daughter, Lotte, was concerned that the sheer scale of the work might be beyond her father's physical powers at his advanced age. Klemperer was persuaded to postpone the idea, but it never came to fruition. A few years after this Klemperer came to accept that his variable health required that the New Philharmonia needed an associate principal conductor, and he approved the appointment of Lorin Maazel. Even so, and possibly mischievously, Klemperer insisted that he should be given the option to conduct the Eighth during the orchestra's 1971-72 season. Even though this did not happen, it shows his abiding respect for the symphony.

Keith Pearce

Penzance, Cornwall

Barbirolli in G&S

The September Letters (page 108) reminds me of a jaw-dropping performance by JB of *The Mikado* with D'Oyly Carte at the Manchester Opera House. Few will now remember it and I never see it referred to, but it was a perfect illustration of what a fantastic conductor can do to turn an otherwise modest experience into one remembered for a lifetime. Does anyone else remember it and is there no record of it?

John Lum

via email

... and in Elgar

I thoroughly enjoyed Geraint Lewis's survey of available recordings of Elgar's Symphony No. 1 past and present (August

Letter of the Month

Wilhelm Furtwängler in London

While a student at the LSE in the early 1950s, I used, almost on a weekly basis, to walk across Waterloo Bridge to the newly built Royal Festival Hall to attend a concert or recital. I cherish many happy recollections of memorable performances by great orchestras, maestros and soloists; one, however, stands out and has remained vividly with me since that time.

It was March 1954 and the great Wilhelm Furtwängler was coming to London to conduct the Philharmonia Orchestra in an all-Beethoven concert. With a friend, we bought tickets, out of curiosity more than anything else, to see that musical monument in the evening of his life. There was still an air of ambivalence surrounding him, as his real role during the Nazi era had not yet become widely known and we were all wondering what kind of reception he would get.

The packed hall greeted him politely but coolly; you could feel the heaviness mingled with anticipation in the air. He walked slowly up to the platform to conduct the first piece, the Fourth Symphony. As he slowly led the orchestra with his frail hands from the introductory *Adagio* to the *Allegro vivace*, the main theme of the first movement, it felt as if the whole hall had lit up and stars were flying all around! By the end of the symphony, we were all on our feet cheering and clapping, feeling relief as



Furtwängler's London Beethoven recalled with awe

well as great joy. He was brought back 13 times – yes 13 – a frail man almost apologetically taking a bow and pointing to the orchestra who were also standing and clapping. By the end of the concert, we all felt that we had participated in a unique occasion, one in a lifetime.

Three days later, Neville Cardus summed it all up, with characteristic British understatement, in *The Manchester Guardian*: 'It was, indeed, a great concert, nobly conducted, nobly played.' Indeed!

A few months later, in November of that year, the great Wilhelm Furtwängler was dead.

Michael Colocassides,
Nicosia, Cyprus

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2019, page 108). The Edward Gardner version is excellent as identified by him. I must take issue, however, with his dismissal of the Barbirolli versions. There have always been two schools of interpreting Elgar, the Boult school and the Barbirolli. Clearly Lewis belongs to the former. Yes,

Barbirolli finds things in the score that I don't think Elgar realised he put there. JB's first recording with the Hallé made me hear this work with different ears, in spite of sub-optimal early stereo sound: my favourite. The last version, recorded live in King's Lynn four days before he

died, is almost as good. Anyone who loves this work should hear what Barbirolli found in it.

*Curtis Rittenhouse
via email*

... and in Houston

Andrew Farach-Colton's delightful feature highlighting a few recordings from Barbirolli's long career (July, page 16) reminded me of the great debt of gratitude I owe to Sir John. He mentioned that during the 1960s he was Music Director of the Houston Symphony. In this he joined other distinguished maestros (Leopold Stokowski and André Previn) who took the job at various times, I expect, to enjoy the mild Texas winters along with the adulation of a young city eager to improve its cultural offerings.

The local newspaper sponsored a Sunday afternoon series during Barbirolli's tenure called 'Chronicle Concerts'. Admission: one dollar. As a boy of 10, I sat in the audience feeling for the first time in my life the sensation of a live symphony orchestra washing over me, watching the tall man up front spring back and forth, smiling, triumphant, long hair flying, his enormous baton slicing the air.

That moment planted a love of music that continues to this day. I have had the joy of listening to, supporting and performing (as an amateur) classical music in the US, Britain, and Europe for more than half a century. Thank you, Sir John.

*John Perry
via email*

Kempff the composer

We all know about Wilhelm Kempff the pianist, but I feel that an assessment of Kempff the composer is really long overdue. This entire aspect of his life seems to have been largely ignored. Kempff's skills as a composer entirely set him apart from the vast majority of pianists of his stature. And yet we continue to label him simply as a pianist.

There are now a number of recordings available of his works and I very much hope this will increase. I have heard some of them and the quality of the music is exceptionally high. Kempff's style and voice are quite unique. There are no poor pastiches in the style of great composers whose works he performed. He also composed for unusual ensembles. Take, for example, his Quartet in G, Op 15 for flute, violin, cello and piano, of which there is an excellent recording on Brilliant

Classics by the Quartetto Raro. There is a fascinating recording of his orchestral works conducted by Werner Andreas Albert and with Rüdiger Steinfatt as pianist. Steinfatt has also recorded a number of Kempff's piano works. So too has one of Kempff's pupils, Idil Biret. His output was broad, and included symphonies, songs and even an opera, *Famile Gozzi*, a comic work in three acts, written in 1934. I have read online that his Second Symphony was premiered in 1929 at the Leipzig Gewandhaus by Wilhelm Furtwängler.

What do we know about Kempff's aspirations as a composer: did he compose for his own personal satisfaction or with the intention of his work being published and performed in his lifetime? Did he perform his own music and to whom? We know of course that he wrote, performed and recorded his own cadenzas for Beethoven's piano concertos, and transcriptions of Bach for piano. Next year will be the 30th anniversary of Kempff's death. Surely that is a good excuse, if one is needed, for an assessment and appreciation of Wilhelm Kempff the composer.

*Frank Ryan
via email*

Spot the sarabande

Further to Lindsay Kemp's short disquisition on the Sarabande, with or without the final 'e', (August, page 12), there are quite a few examples among more recent compositions, beginning with the noble Sarabande of the Sons of God in Vaughan Williams's *Job*. Herbert Howells wrote a beautiful and touching Sarabande for Thurston Dart, among the delightful pastiche pieces in *Howells' Clavichord*. The fine slow movement of Alan Rawsthorne's Third Symphony is called *Alla Sarabanda*, while another sarabande forms the opening movement of his Suite for recorder and piano. Rawsthorne also made extensive use of the well-known La folia tune in his score for the film *Saraband for Dead Lovers* (an excerpt from the film score, entitled 'Saraband and Carnival', arranged by the late composer Gerard Schurmann, can be found on the Chandos CD of the film music of Alan Rawsthorne, with the BBC PO conducted by Rumon Gamba). Within my late husband John McCabe's work, the fifth variation of his *Variations on a Theme of Hartmann*, a chaconne in technique, is entitled Sarabande.

*Monica McCabe
via email*

NEXT MONTH AWARDS 2020



The best of the best

Our special issue brings you full coverage of our annual Awards. Who will be named Artist of the Year? Which ensemble has the public voted for as its Orchestra of the Year? And which album has been crowned by our critics as Recording of the Year 2020?

Margaret Price

In Icons, Richard Fairman celebrates the legacy of the Welsh soprano who possessed a voice of incomparable purity in Mozart and Verdi

Beethoven's Fidelio

The composer's only opera is the subject of next month's Collection - Mike Ashman listens to the many available recordings of this powerful work, and names his favourites

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Antonio Pappano

The Music Director of the Royal Opera and Rome's Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia on his Beethoven year, so far ...

I've just been in Italy for a month doing the Beethoven symphony cycle outdoors. We were sold out – over 1000 people for every concert – it was amazing. We did five concerts in Rome and then we went to baptise the new bridge in Genoa – we played underneath it (with the construction still going on!). Then we went to Torre del Lago and mixed a Beethoven No 5 with a little Puccini – if you can imagine that. We did Beethoven Nos 5 and 8 in the gardens at Caserta where there's an amazing Bourbon royal palace – it's like Versailles, only bigger and grander. But I don't recommend conducting Beethoven No 5 in almost 40 degree heat!

As a young boy, six or seven, the one piece that sticks out is the Romance in G. I was big on that one. I remember playing it for the other kids at St Vincent's Primary School. It was my first 'recital' – just playing that one number. Then – more G major! – Op 49 No 2 but it was the *Pathétique* that was the big milestone because technically and musically, even for a young student, it's quite advanced. And it's very dramaturgical.

Interestingly enough, I didn't spend a lot of time with Beethoven at the piano. That's happened much more in the last ten years when I've been conducting the symphonies. So, to prepare, I've been going back; playing and studying the sonatas that I was acquainted with but hadn't really worked on. I've made it my mission, especially this go-around with the Beethoven cycle, to study them in a different way; to really put myself into the composer's seat. What is he actually doing, and how is he doing it? Though certain things are obvious, the incredible power of accumulation – either through repetition or variation – changes you for ever. A recapitulation – the restatement of the first theme – is by its very nature affected by what's come before. And what Beethoven does is put the onus on the interpreter to somehow convey to the listener that something has changed. When you start to understand the process you realise that these are, in a way, his other operas. They are so tightly staged, air-tight dramaturgically! I've got so much more out of the experience of doing the symphonies this time. I feel like my ears and eyes have been opened to a whole new thing.

The biggest journey I've gone through is with the Fifth, the first Beethoven symphony I conducted. I could never really figure out what the second-movement theme meant – or meant to me anyway. I always thought of it as a contrast, like a promenade after the *Sturm und Drang* of the first movement. But actually, lately, I've come to see it as prayerful. It's very sad, meaningful and so personal.

Beethoven provided another seminal experience: recording, with Ian Bostridge, *An die ferne Geliebte*. It's one of the great



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things. It's through-composed and the transformations from section to section are miraculous. It's Beethoven writing, though in a very classical style, like someone really talking to you; how he creates the sense of distance and the yearning for contact. It's not an easy piece to interpret. When someone is musing, by its very nature it can get self-indulgent, especially when another person is not replying. So, to keep it alive was a challenge. But when we got to the moment where it goes into A flat major I remember being so affected by it that it was almost all I could do to keep my fingers on the keyboard. This melody, so simple, is like the last offering to the beloved – to sing this song to her.

Then there was *Fidelio* at Covent Garden. Although I've already conducted it three times, this time I was on a mission – despite all the famous problems of its dramaturgy, or its lack thereof – to try and make it so that the orchestra is the engine for the whole thing, and make the singers expressive and yet fit into an orchestral fabric. I was working with an incredible director, Tobias Kratzer, who really believed in these personalities and didn't see them as robots. There was a really dramatic flow and relationship between them. **G**

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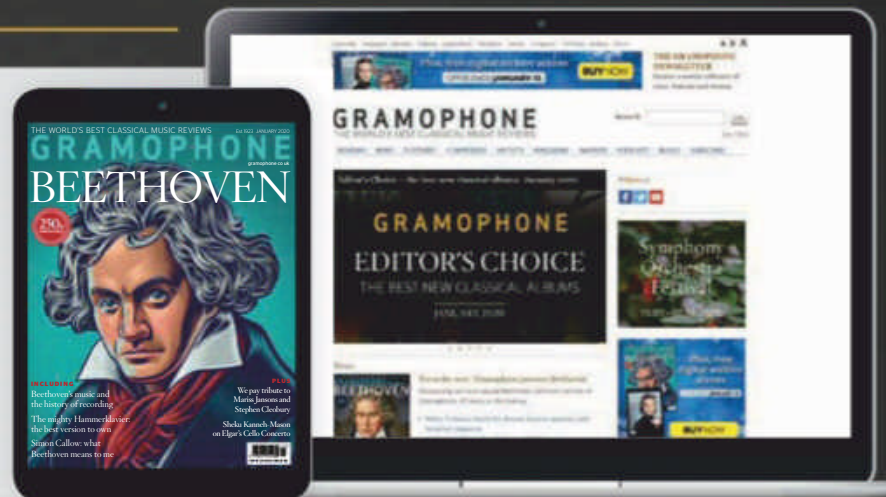


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